

University of Dundee

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

George MacDonald and Victorian Society

Smith, Jeffrey Wayne

Award date:
2013

[Link to publication](#)

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

GEORGE MACDONALD

AND

VICTORIAN SOCIETY

JEFFREY WAYNE SMITH

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Dundee

September 2013

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iv
Declaration	v
Abstract	vi
Abbreviations	vii
 Chapter One: Introduction	 1
A Brief Guide to Reading the Thesis	3
Part 1: Critical Assessment	5
MacDonald's Nonfiction: Writings on the Development of the Imagination and Spiritual Progression	15
Part 2: MacDonald's Social Views and Ideas	20
MacDonald and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Change	20
Transitions between Town and Country in MacDonald's Novels	28
The Ills of Industrialism in <i>The Princess and Curdie</i> and <i>St. George and St. Michael</i>	39
 Chapter Two: The City	 46
Introduction	46
Part 1: George MacDonald, Octavia Hill, and the Kyrle Society	49
Octavia Hill	49
The Kyrle Society	58
Part 2: Slums and Urban Philanthropy in London, 1860s-1880s	67
Part 3: Urban Philanthropy in <i>Robert Falconer</i> , <i>The Vicar's Daughter</i> , and <i>Weighed and Wanting</i>	75
The Philanthropists	84
Housing Reform	92
Charity	99
Spiritual Reformation	103

Chapter Three: Nature	115
Introduction	115
Part 1: ‘Prophets of Nature’: George MacDonald and William Wordsworth	118
Part 2: Finding God in Nature	131
The ‘Veil’ of Nature	131
Pantheism in <i>What’s Mine’s Mine</i>	137
‘Divine Air’ and ‘God’s Steeples’ in ‘A Journey Rejourneyed’ and <i>Wilfrid Cumbermede</i>	150
Part 3: Victorian Environmentalism and Urban Green Space in <i>Guild Court</i>	169
Chapter Four: Animals	187
Introduction	187
Part 1: Animal Care: Representations of Vivisection, Vegetarianism, Hunting, and Animal Discipline and Abuse	192
MacDonald and the Vivisection Debate	192
Vegetarianism in <i>Paul Faber, Surgeon</i> and ‘The Golden Key’	214
The Ethics of Hunting in <i>What’s Mine’s Mine</i>	219
Animal Discipline and Abuse in MacDonald’s Novels	225
Part 2: The Human Animal: Representations of Evolution and Degeneration	238
Chapter Five: Conclusion	260
Thesis Summation	260
Ideas for Future Research	264
Bibliography	268

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, my gratitude is given to my supervisor, Dr David Robb. Not only was David's advice and guidance essential to the development of my thesis, but his warm friendship was essential to my overall wellbeing as a PhD student. To the School of English at the University of Dundee, whose members always encouraged me to carry on, I am deeply grateful. For providing me with the resources I needed for research as well as a quiet place to study, I offer my express thanks to the University of Dundee library, British Library, National Library of Scotland, Brander Library in Huntly, King's College London Library and Archives, and Brunel University Library. My family in the USA, who have patiently endured my uninterrupted absence for the past four years, I thank with all my heart. Lastly, my thanks goes to my loving wife, Sericea Stallings-Smith, who, despite her current work as a DrPH research student at Brunel University, constantly supported me. With a clear head and steady heart, I thank you!

DECLARATION

This thesis has been composed by myself, and all references cited have been consulted by me. I have researched the work of which the thesis is a record, and declare that it has not been previously accepted for a higher degree.

ABSTRACT

This thesis approaches the ways George MacDonald viewed and represented Victorian society in his novels by analysing select social issues which he felt compelled to address.

Chapter One introduces the thesis. It contains a review of critical commentary on MacDonald's work, as well as discussions on his non-fictional texts and essays, industrialism, and the great rural-urban divide of the nineteenth century.

Chapter Two concentrates on MacDonald's representations of the city in *Robert Falconer* (1868), *The Vicar's Daughter* (1872), and *Weighed and Wanting* (1882) by underscoring parallels between Octavia Hill's housing and environmental schemes and situations which he experienced firsthand.

Chapter Three examines the influence of Nature on MacDonald's theology and social views. Special emphasis is placed on Wordsworth and the development of MacDonald's unique pantheism in his texts, such as the short story, 'A Journey Rejourneyed' (1865-6), *Guild Court* (1868), *Wilfrid Cumbermede* (1872), *What's Mine's Mine* (1886), and *Home Again* (1887).

Chapter Four uncovers MacDonald's involvement with the animal welfare movement during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Discussions on vivisection, vegetarianism, hunting, animal abuse, evolution, and degeneration are provided with a wide range of MacDonald's texts, such as *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (1865), *Paul Faber, Surgeon* (1879), *The Marquis of Lossie* (1877), *A Rough Shaking* (1890), and *Heather and Snow* (1893).

Chapter Five offers a short summation of the thesis. It affirms that MacDonald was deeply troubled by certain social issues that were raised within his society and would use his fiction to express his concerns. The conclusion also offers a few suggestive topics for ongoing research in the field of this thesis.

ABBREVIATIONS

There is no standard edition of MacDonald's works; however, all have been reprinted and published by Johannesen Printing and Publishing. Most references to MacDonald's work have been taken from these editions. In some instances, Johannesen has reproduced an American edition which, subsequently, offers certain variants in spelling (e.g. 'labour' is spelled 'labor'). First editions are only available in main libraries (such as the British Library and the National Library of Scotland), and other, antique editions may also be found. Thus, the reader is likely to encounter a variety of editions. As pagination can vary from edition to edition, all references from MacDonald's texts include the main title, chapter number, chapter title, and page number. Finally, some titles by MacDonald and his son, Greville, have been abbreviated if they have been continually repeated. The following is a list of abbreviations used in this thesis.

George MacDonald's Texts:

<i>AF</i>	<i>Alec Forbes of Howglen</i>
<i>ABNW</i>	<i>At the Back of the North Wind</i>
<i>DE</i>	<i>David Elginbrod</i>
<i>GC</i>	<i>Guild Court: A London Story</i>
<i>HA</i>	<i>Home Again</i>
<i>HG</i>	<i>The Hope of the Gospel</i>
<i>ML</i>	<i>The Marquis of Lossie</i>
<i>Orts</i>	<i>A Dish of Orts</i>
<i>PC</i>	<i>The Princess and Curdie</i>
<i>PFS</i>	<i>Paul Faber, Surgeon</i>
<i>PW</i>	<i>Poetical Works</i>
<i>RF</i>	<i>Robert Falconer</i>
<i>RS</i>	<i>A Rough Shaking</i>
<i>SGSM</i>	<i>St. George and St. Michael</i>
<i>US</i>	<i>Unspoken Sermons</i>
<i>VD</i>	<i>The Vicar's Daughter</i>
<i>WC</i>	<i>Wilfrid Cumbermede</i>
<i>WMM</i>	<i>What's Mine's Mine</i>
<i>WW</i>	<i>Weighed and Wanting</i>

Greville MacDonald's Texts:

<i>GMDW</i>	<i>George MacDonald and His Wife</i>
<i>Rems</i>	<i>Reminiscences of a Specialist</i>

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

To date, George MacDonald has been largely neglected in critical discussions of socially-conscious nineteenth-century British literature. The reason for this oversight may be that MacDonald's first champions, such as C.S. Lewis, G.K. Chesterton, and W.H. Auden, have primarily honoured him with accolades for his fantasy fiction and English fairy tales at the expense of his novels. This is unfortunate, and this thesis will go some way to redressing this imbalance.

Although some critical attention has been given to the novels, there is a good deal more research to be done, especially regarding the ways in which the events of the nineteenth century informed and shaped MacDonald's writing with social and political factors. Since the nature of his novels is similar to those written by his contemporaries, like Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Elizabeth Gaskell, a study considering the social issues that were important to this author will have much to offer not only MacDonald scholars, but also scholars of nineteenth-century literature and society who are interested in literary representations of the city, Nature, and the animal welfare movement.

MacDonald lived in an era that was undergoing a crisis of change. The first half of the nineteenth century saw the rapid growth of cities and Britain's metamorphosis into an industrial power. By the middle of the century, advancements in the fields of science and natural history began to collide fiercely with conservative religious attitudes. Eventually, as Queen Victoria's empire expanded across the globe, the core of Britain's society was riddled with political debate and plagued by religious doubt. MacDonald struggled to understand the consequences of these

large developments and conflicts. Religious debates, especially, played a significant part in MacDonald's moral and intellectual life. Indeed, having been forced to resign from his first and only pulpit ministry due to allegations of potential heresy, MacDonald expressed his singular theological ideas through lay sermons and, more publically, through spiritually-themed novels. While this thesis would not claim that MacDonald was a socially-conscious novelist, as may be argued with Dickens or Gaskell, it will suggest that he was, indeed, concerned with certain social issues during his day and expressed these concerns with his fiction.

As long as the ongoing lack of scholarly interest in MacDonald's non-fantasy literature remains, there will be an incomplete portrait of MacDonald. Despite his fame today as a Victorian children's writer and fantasy novelist, MacDonald was a successful novelist, and like other socially-concerned novelists, he was aware of the major social issues of his day such as the negative consequences of commercialism, housing reformation, and slum development in the city (especially within London's East End). As well, he was particularly troubled with the plight of laboratory animals slated for vivisection and was one of the leading writers to promote antivivisection feelings in a novel. Yet, he would never consent to give newspaper interviews when approached, and so it is difficult to argue that he played a significant role with any of these issues. However, he endeavoured to promote ideas in his novels, believing that they would have a good effect on society. Though his endeavours have been overlooked, he did much to promote social reform which brought art and beauty to the poor and supported environmental land preservation campaigns. These endeavours reveal a wealth of information about his view of society as well as his unique theology. Uncovering these activities and paralleling them with his fiction, as well as uncovering his obscure and neglected novels, a new portrait of MacDonald, yet to be fully realised, may be shown. This thesis seeks to unveil this portrait.

A Brief Guide to Reading the Thesis

The goal of the thesis is to analyse MacDonald's knowledge and assessment of the Victorian society to which he formed a part. Each chapter presents a single issue and begins with a short introduction that serves as a preview of what is to come as well as to acquaint the reader with the historical period and its relevance to MacDonald's life and literature.

This introductory chapter, which provides a foundation for the thesis, is divided into two parts. Part One is divided into two subsections. The first subsection offers a critical survey of past and current academic discussions on MacDonald's work. Its main intention is to demonstrate what little attention has actually been given to MacDonald's treatment of social issues in his novels. The second subsection presents MacDonald's theological and intellectual works: essays, mostly, regarding the growth and maintenance of what he believed to be a healthy imagination. These works are of great consequence to understanding MacDonald's mentality and, as they will be explored in conjunction with MacDonald's fiction throughout the thesis, it seems appropriate that they should be summarised here.

Part Two sets the stage of the thesis further by arguing that MacDonald's novels represent a union of realism and romance, a literary manoeuvre popularised by earlier nineteenth-century novelists, such as Dickens and Scott. It also provides definitions for the terminology which will be used throughout the thesis. Phrases such as 'the age of transition' and the 'condition of England' are both defined and given a historical perspective. Likewise, the spiritual theories which MacDonald demonstrates in his work are discussed. These theories form the core of MacDonald's spiritual ideology and an understanding of these is an essential component for this thesis. Lastly, it serves as a transition from the 'Introduction' to the main body of the thesis itself by arguing that MacDonald did not turn from the problems of his century

by writing fantasy; instead, it shows a distinct engagement with certain social problems that he felt were significantly related to his personal religion, such as man's relationship with Nature, his obligations to alleviating urban poverty and suffering, and his ability to fight for the welfare of animals.

Chapter Two reveals the extent to which he was troubled by industrial greed and the plight of the urban poor. It explores at length how his unique theology and writings were enhanced by the social work and methodologies of Octavia Hill and her group of fellow-workers to which he and his family formed a part. To do this, a lengthy discussion of Hill and MacDonald's working relationships with her is necessary. A discussion is also provided to locate MacDonald's involvement with the Kyrle Society. Although the Kyrle Society was renowned throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century and can be considered the forerunner for the National Trust, it has been almost entirely forgotten today. This discussion not only suggests MacDonald's involvement with the Kyrle Society, but it also attempts to regenerate academic interest in the history of the Society as a whole. These initial discussions are then applied to a literary analysis of MacDonald's novels.

Chapter Three examines the role(s) that Nature plays on the spiritual growth of MacDonald's heroes. It begins with a discussion of the impact that William Wordsworth's poetry had on MacDonald's writings. An attempt is also made to present MacDonald as a Christian pantheist, a term which MacDonald, himself, uses to describe the pantheism of Wordsworth. A close reading of *Guild Court* is given to highlight MacDonald's belief that green spaces can serve as both physical and spiritual places of rejuvenation in the city.

Chapter Four looks at the 'animal' issues of MacDonald's day, specifically those issues regarding animal experimentation (i.e. vivisection) and the question of evolution. Other animal-

related social issues, such as the rise of the vegetarian movement and its place in MacDonald's literature, are also discussed.

Chapter Five concludes the thesis with a brief summation of the major discussions covered. It also suggests other topics related to those social issues explored in the thesis and that deserve to be mentioned, but were not given whole chapters due to time restraints and thesis length requirements. These topics also allow room for ongoing research.

Part One

Critical Assessment

MacDonald did not keep a personal journal; any details of events influencing his social views are accessible only through saved correspondence along with an authoritative biography written by his eldest son, Greville MacDonald, entitled *George MacDonald and His Wife* (1924).¹ Several years later, Greville published his autobiography, *Reminiscences of a Specialist* (1932), which further contributes to a portrait of MacDonald.² Significantly, both works provide evidence that MacDonald harboured deeply-set political ideals. Greville's work chronicles various events in which the MacDonald family collaborated with social reformers such as Octavia Hill and actively participated in the formation of the Kyrle Society (although the society is never explicitly named in *George MacDonald and His Wife*).

¹ Greville MacDonald, *George MacDonald and His Wife* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1924; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2005); cited as *GMDW*.

² Greville MacDonald, *Reminiscences of a Specialist* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932); cited as *Rems*.

Apart from Greville's accounts of his father's life, two other major biographies have been produced, William Raeper's *George MacDonald* (1987) and Rolland Hein's *George MacDonald—Victorian Mythmaker* (1993).³ There have also been two minor biographies by Kathy Triggs and Elizabeth Saintsbury.⁴ These biographies give alternate vantage points into his life and development as an author; yet, apart from Raeper, who provides sufficient literary discussion, they add little beyond what Greville has already written regarding MacDonald's social interests. Though none mention MacDonald's involvement with the Kyrle Society, they all confirm his volunteer work with Hill. Therefore, it is indeed surprising that such little scholarly work has appeared on MacDonald's interest in the social issues of the day.

Although studies regarding MacDonald's life and works have increased since the latter half of the twentieth century, most scholarly activity has been primarily engaged with the development of his fantasy and children's literature. The small attention that has been directed towards his non-fantasy novels has largely been dismissive. One of the earliest MacDonald scholars, C.S. Lewis, who re-introduced MacDonald to twentieth-century readers, heaped accolades upon MacDonald as a master of mythopoeia. Interested primarily in MacDonald's fantasy and theological works, Lewis neglected MacDonald's merit as a Victorian novelist. In fact, Lewis declared: 'Necessity made Macdonald [sic] a novelist, but few of his novels are good and none are very good'.⁵ In the end, Lewis claims that MacDonald was a 'poor novelist' but a

³ William Raeper, *George MacDonald* (Tring: Lion, 1987); Rolland Hein, *George MacDonald—Victorian Mythmaker* (Nashville, TN: Starsong, 1993; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1999).

⁴ Kathy Triggs, *The Stars and the Stillness: A Portrait of George MacDonald* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1986); Elizabeth Saintsbury, *George MacDonald: A Short Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1987).

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *George MacDonald: An Anthology* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946), p. 17.

‘supreme preacher’ (17). This declaration, Catherine Durie suggests, has been the greatest hindrance to the resurrection of modern interest in the novels.⁶

Post-Lewis, critics such as Robert Lee Wolff, Richard Reis, Rolland Hein, and David S. Robb divided the novels into two separate camps: the English and Scottish, with the latter being seen as decidedly stronger. Wolff’s *The Golden Key: A Study of the Fiction of George MacDonald* (1961), was the first major analysis of MacDonald’s work and laid the groundwork for establishing prominent themes within the fiction.⁷ However, Wolff’s study, a heavily psychoanalytical reading of the sort popular during the latter half of the twentieth century, has now become rather dated. Despite this, he was the first to suggest various writers and ideas which would have influenced and inspired MacDonald. Of these, Wolff seemed most interested in German Romantic sources, such as Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg) and E.T.A. Hoffmann (372-3). Wolff also acknowledged MacDonald’s friendship with social reformers like Hill and John Ruskin and suggested that key characters in MacDonald’s fiction were based on their prototypes (268, 273, 276-7, and 296). Furthermore, Wolff implied that MacDonald used his fiction to suggest that becoming an urban social worker or a country farmer ‘were the two best things a man could do’, and added that if MacDonald had not met with literary success, then he would have done either of the two (325). Yet, Wolff also perceived that MacDonald ‘regarded the social system as dreadful, and as needing constant mitigation at the hands of the kind saints among mankind, but as essentially irrelevant’ (325). Wolff argued that because of MacDonald’s belief that all things journey towards God, and that even evil itself would one day be seen as ‘the best good’, he must have felt that the need for humanitarian service was not of great importance (325). With this argument, Wolff overlooked MacDonald’s great esteem for the social worker,

⁶ Catherine Durie, ‘George MacDonald and C.S. Lewis’ in *The Gold Thread: Essays on George MacDonald*, ed. by William Raeper (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1990), pp. 163-85.

⁷ Robert Lee Wolff, *The Golden Key: A Study of the Fiction of George MacDonald* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1961).

closely coupled with his personal belief that there is a spiritual obligation to serve those in need. Indeed, MacDonald's spiritual writings seem to say something different. They indicate that although the problem of evil exists and man suffers, it is the duty of mankind to serve humanity for its betterment. Furthermore, his characters have the ability to find meaning in their suffering, which helps them to seek God and to accept his will.

Looking beyond Wolff's psychoanalysis, Richard Reis treats MacDonald's work with a historical context and gives more emphasis to his theology. Additionally, Reis dedicates a chapter to what he calls MacDonald's 'realistic' novels, but his attempt to discuss the novels as significant works in the MacDonald canon is flawed. Whilst arguing that MacDonald was primarily a didactic and conventional writer of the time, Reis fails to see the originality of the novels; therefore, he gives them little attention and instead highlights only the works of fantasy.⁸ For example, although he does emphasise that MacDonald's theology was based on faith that required action, he does not consider the treatment of the 'hero' in the novels as the author's illustration of what these 'actors' ought to do; according to him, the 'MacDonald Hero is simple—simply a bore' (40-1 and 68). This thesis suggests otherwise. By taking a historical and theological approach, the 'MacDonald Hero' is presented as the embodiment of the author's humanitarian concerns.

In his book, *The Harmony Within: The Spiritual Vision of George MacDonald*, Rolland Hein places more emphasis on MacDonald's theology than does Reis.⁹ In fact, Hein's approach to MacDonald, as it was in his biography, *George MacDonald—Victorian Mythmaker*, is exclusively derived from a Christian standpoint. Such exclusiveness sometimes mars Hein's

⁸ Richard Reis, *George MacDonald* (New York: Twayne, 1972); republished as *George MacDonald's Fiction: A Twentieth-Century View*, Masterline Series 3 (Eureka, CA: Sunrise, 1989).

⁹ Rolland Hein, *The Harmony Within: The Spiritual Vision of George MacDonald* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1982; revised and reprinted by Chicago: Cornerstone, 1999).

argument, just as Wolff's exclusively Freudian approach sometimes limits broader interpretation. Yet, despite giving the appearance of single-sidedness, Hein's recommendation that MacDonald should be read as a Christian writer is well-founded. A very brief discussion is given to the 'realistic' novels, but Hein's main interests lie in surveying MacDonald's spiritual growth and the development of mythopoeia in his fantasy writings.

David S. Robb offers a brief biographical sketch of MacDonald's life whilst placing more emphasis on his Scottish heritage.¹⁰ His unpublished doctoral thesis (University of Edinburgh, 1980) and book-length study, *George MacDonald* (1987), produced, to date, the most in-depth discussions of MacDonald's non-fantasy, and in them, he has argued that *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (1865) and *Malcolm* (1875) should be valued as major nineteenth-century Scottish works of fiction.¹¹ Thus, Robb opposes Reis's view that MacDonald demonstrated little merit as a novelist and instead, connects the much-discussed fantasy works to the 'realistic' novels by highlighting MacDonald's use of allegory in both. However, Robb has only discussed the Scottish novels and no attention is given to those within the English category.

This thesis echoes Robb's historical approach to uncovering more of MacDonald's literary heritage, but it does so through the perspective of his social views. Attention is directed away from MacDonald's fantasy and children's literature and is turned to both the English and Scottish novels, wherein the development and purpose of the MacDonald hero (defined and discussed in the following chapter) is shown to illustrate the extent to which MacDonald, both in his writings and in his real life, was engaged with his society.

¹⁰ David S. Robb, *George MacDonald* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987); republished as *God's Fiction: Symbolism and Allegory in the Works of George MacDonald*, Masterline Series 4 (Eureka, CA: Sunrise, 1989).

¹¹ David S. Robb, *The Scottish Novels of George MacDonald* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1980).

Despite Robb's encouragement to reconsider MacDonald as a significant nineteenth-century Scottish novelist, no other book-length study with this purpose in mind has yet surfaced. Instead, there has been a surge of publications by Stephen Prickett, Colin Manlove, and U.C. Knoepfmacher, all of which convey an exclusive interest in MacDonald's fantasy and children's fiction.¹² A few of the more recent discussions of MacDonald's fantasy include Daniel Gabelman's argument that MacDonald guides his readers' perception of faith through his fairy tales; whereas Gisela Hildegard Kregliner focuses upon the genre of the parable as the medium that MacDonald used in the development of his fairy tale.¹³ Using *Lilith* (1895), Kregliner argues that MacDonald's fantasy is best interpreted when it is comprehended as parabolic speech and that spiritual truths which must be discovered by the reader are hidden within the text. Another interpretation from Deirdre Christine Hayward uncovers potential sources of inspiration for MacDonald's literature.¹⁴ Hayward constructs an argument around three, specific writers (Novalis, Johann Fichte, and Jacob Boehme) whose intellectual frameworks may be found throughout MacDonald's literature.

Additionally, Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson discusses the growth of MacDonald's mythopoeic mastery.¹⁵ Johnson is, once again, more concerned with the fantasy and discusses *The Princess and Curdie* (1883) and *Lilith* (1895) at length. Her study also underscores the inspiration that MacDonald received from Ruskin and F.D. Maurice and expands the discussion of other

¹² Stephen Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976) and *Victorian Fantasy* (Sussex: Harvester, 1979); Colin Manlove, *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975); U.C. Knoepfmacher, *Ventures into Childland: Victorians, Fairy Tales and Femininity* (U of Chicago P, 1998).

¹³ Daniel Gabelman, 'Divine Carelessness': *The Fairytale Levity of George MacDonald* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St Andrews, 2011); Gisela Hildegard Kregliner, *George MacDonald's Christian Fiction: Parables, Imagination and Dreams* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St Andrews, 2008).

¹⁴ Deirdre Christine Hayward, *George MacDonald and Three German Thinkers* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Dundee, 2000).

¹⁵ Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson, *Rooted in All Its Story, More is Meant than Meets the Ear: A Study of the Relational and Revelational Nature of George MacDonald's Mythopoeic Art* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St Andrews, 2011).

individuals of importance to the formation of MacDonald's mythopoeia, like A.J. Scott, who have received little previous attention. Her discussion of Scott suggests that he was responsible for aiding the development of MacDonald's *weltanschauung* (his view of the world).

Of equal interest has been the interpretation of MacDonald's unique spirituality. Both Kerry Dearborn and Miho Yamaguchi remind us that MacDonald was a theological writer.¹⁶ These studies illustrate the tremendous appeal that MacDonald's fantasy and spirituality have to offer scholars and lay-readers alike. The most recent study offering some discussion of MacDonald's novels is Ginger Stelle's.¹⁷ Stelle deconstructs the modes of fantasy and realism which divides MacDonald's work and then reconstructs his image as a master Victorian writer. Through this, she analyses several of the minor novels which had previously received little attention.

Several anthologies have been produced by William Raeper, Roderick McGillis, Jean Webb, and Lucas H. Harriman, though these also have granted more attention to MacDonald's fantasy and children's literature.¹⁸ Of these anthologies, only a few essays attempt to discuss MacDonald's concern with poor social conditions. David L. Neuhouser's article, 'George MacDonald and Social Issues' in Webb's anthology, has been the first and most direct attempt at addressing this particular subject in MacDonald's work.¹⁹ Neuhouser recognises MacDonald's concern for poverty, women's rights, environmental issues, and animal rights; however,

¹⁶ Kerry Dearborn, *Baptized Imagination: The Theology of George MacDonald* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006); Miho Yamaguchi, *George MacDonald's Challenging Theology of the Atonement, Suffering, and Death* (Tucson, AZ: Wheatmark, 2007).

¹⁷ Ginger Stelle, *A Swipe at the Dragon of the Commonplace: A Re-Evaluation of George MacDonald's Fiction* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St Andrews, 2011).

¹⁸ William Raeper, ed., *The Gold Thread: Essays on George MacDonald* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1990); Roderick McGillis, ed., *For the Childlike: George MacDonald's Fantasies for Children* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992); Jean Webb, ed., *'A Noble Unrest': Contemporary Essays on the Work of George MacDonald* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007); Lucas H. Harriman, ed., *Lilith in a New Light: Essays on the George MacDonald Fantasy Novel* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2008).

¹⁹ David L. Neuhouser, 'George MacDonald and Social Issues', in *'A Noble Unrest': Contemporary Essays on the Work of George MacDonald*, ed. by Jean Webb (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 6-14.

Neuhouser's discussion is brief and only a few examples within MacDonald's novels are cited. Nevertheless, Neuhouser's point is clear: MacDonald was concerned with the major social issues of his day and reflects such topics in his fiction. This thesis builds upon Neuhouser's ideas by analysing a large selection of MacDonald's novels, illustrating his sense of spiritual duty and showing how this duty prompted his heroes to respond with compassion towards particular societal problems.

In the same anthology, Jean Webb discusses problems with nineteenth-century capitalism and economy in MacDonald's fantasy novel, *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871).²⁰ Her analysis goes deeper than Neuhouser's discussion through the parallel points she establishes between Diamond's fantastical dream-episodes with North Wind and the apparently realistic experiences of his everyday life. She claims that such fantastic episodes enable the young character to cope with the reality and duties of his daily life as well as to equip him to minister to his family and community.

Lastly, A. Waller Hastings discusses MacDonald's fairy tale, 'Cross Purposes' (1867), in terms of Victorian class divisions and socialism, stating:

MacDonald did not regard the visionary and socio-political realms as either separate or inimical, and rooted his fantasies in social reality. Even his most transcendent Christian fantasies [...] have a strong component of social critique and imaginative exploration of a Christian Socialist utopia.²¹

Thus, Hastings suggests that MacDonald incorporates social divisions even in fairyland as a means to teach children to look beyond such trivialities and understand that a person's worth is not determined by their position in society. This thesis expands Hastings's theory by proposing

²⁰ Jean Webb, 'Realism, Fantasy and a Critique of Nineteenth Century Society in George MacDonald's *At the Back of the North Wind*', in her *'A Noble Unrest': Contemporary Essays on the Work of George MacDonald* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 15-32.

²¹ A. Waller Hastings, 'Social Conscience and Class Relations in MacDonald's "Cross Purposes"', in *For the Childlike: George MacDonald's Fantasies for Children*, ed. by Roderick McGillis (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992), pp. 75-86, p. 78.

that MacDonald uses a similar method within his novels in the hope that his adult readers could also meet the challenge of overlooking social boundaries for the good of humanity.

The most recent anthology on MacDonald's work is *Rethinking George MacDonald: Contexts and Contemporaries* (2013). As well, it is the first anthology to appear with the intention of looking beyond MacDonald's fantasy fiction and children's literature in order to cast a broader perspective of MacDonald's life and works. Of the articles, the only one to consider the issue of social reform in the nineteenth century is my contribution, 'George MacDonald's Approach to Victorian Social Reform in *The Vicar's Daughter*'. The article represents a fuller discussion of Octavia Hill's influence on MacDonald's work, specifically with his character, Marion Clare, from *The Vicar's Daughter* (1872). Additional points of Hill's reformatory theories and schemes are paralleled with the novel to uncover MacDonald's own developing views of society and social reform.²² Chapter Two of this thesis offers a much expanded discussion of these issues as represented in *The Vicar's Daughter* and other novels.

One other article in the anthology that relates to the idea of this thesis is Ally Crockford's 'Sitting on the Doorstep: MacDonald's Aesthetic Fantasy Worlds in the Divine Child-Figure'. Crockford makes a similar argument to Jean Webb, claiming that the social situations faced by Diamond shape him to become a mediator between the physical and spiritual worlds.²³ Yet, once again, attention has been given to MacDonald's fantasy fiction while his non-fantasy novels are ignored.

²² Jeffrey W. Smith, 'George MacDonald's Approach to Victorian Social Reform in *The Vicar's Daughter*' in *Rethinking George MacDonald: Contexts and Contemporaries*, ed. by Christopher MacLachlan, John Patrick Pazdziora, and Ginger Stelle (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2013), pp. 69-83.

²³ Ally Crockford, 'Sitting on the Doorstep: MacDonald's Aesthetic Fantasy Worlds and the Divine Child-Figure' in *Rethinking George MacDonald: Contexts and Contemporaries*, ed. by Christopher MacLachlan, John Patrick Pazdziora, and Ginger Stelle (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2013), pp. 140-56.

In summary, the past few decades have shown an ever growing interest in MacDonald's work, but the focus of attention has been given to the fantasy and children's literature. Some discussion of the non-fantasy literature has been given, but it has been sporadic. Therefore, MacDonald has not been fully considered as a significant nineteenth-century novelist. The aim of this thesis is to conduct a thorough analysis of MacDonald's portrayal of Victorian social issues within his non-fantasy fiction, with equal attention given to both the Scottish and English novels.

Indeed, as most past and current discussions about MacDonald's work deal exclusively with his contribution to fantasy and children's literature, few of the above sources have been particularly helpful to this thesis. Certain exceptions are given to the two major biographies by Greville MacDonald and William Raeper. David S. Robb's work has also been helpful, mostly because Robb looks beyond the fantasies and discusses MacDonald from a historical context. As such, this thesis builds upon his work. Robert Lee Wolff, despite his dated angle for reading MacDonald, has also served as a general source for this thesis. As well, Wolff was the first to suggest the important role that certain of MacDonald's contemporaries played regarding his fiction. This thesis, particularly Chapter Two, builds upon his brief findings. Other, general sources have been useful and are referenced throughout the thesis. Yet, in the end, the primary source for this thesis has simply been the novels themselves, as well as the correspondence saved at the Beinecke Library and the National Library of Scotland, some of which has been made available in Glen Sadler's book, *An Expression of Character: The Letters of George MacDonald*.²⁴

²⁴ Glenn Edward Sadler, ed., *An Expression of Character: The Letters of George MacDonald* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994).

MacDonald's Non-fiction: Writings on the Development of the Imagination and Spiritual Progression

Before this thesis can commence with its reading of MacDonald's work, a brief survey of MacDonald's non-fiction, particularly those essays and sermons which this thesis builds upon, should be given. Not only are these essays and sermons referenced throughout the thesis, they continually express what MacDonald is ever trying to present in his fiction.

As soon as MacDonald was forced to resign from his Arundel pulpit in 1853, he fled to his friend A.J. Scott in Manchester and embarked towards a new vocation as a lecturer on English literature. Thereafter, MacDonald moved to London in 1859, where, guided by such friends as F.D. Maurice and Lady Byron, he further developed this career by securing a post as a professor of English Literature at Bedford College, a post which he held until 1867, and he was a lecturer on English poetry at Maurice's Working Men's College. Both Scott and Maurice were greatly responsible for shaping MacDonald's religious and educational views. MacDonald highly esteemed both men as well, as evidenced by the naming of his daughter, Lilia Scott (1852-1891), and son, Maurice (1864-1879), after them.²⁵ He also wrote two poems praising Maurice in his *Poetical Works* (1893).²⁶ Encouraged by their influence, MacDonald developed a unique and personal theology which he expressed within his literature and also in three volumes of *Unspoken Sermons* (1867, 1885, and 1889) and a fourth volume of sermons entitled *The Hope of the Gospel* (1892).

Of particular importance to this thesis is *The Hope of the Gospel*, which contains the sermon, 'The Hope of the Universe'. The sermon, published after the vivisection debate came to

²⁵ Raeper points out that MacDonald had originally approached Ruskin to be his son's godfather, but Ruskin declined the honour due to religious reasons (*George MacDonald*, p. 224).

²⁶ See George MacDonald's 'A Thanksgiving for F.D. Maurice' and 'To A.J. Scott' in *Poetical Works*, 2 vols (London: Chatto & Windus, 1893; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1996), I; cited as *PW1* or *PW2*, *PW1*, pp. 271-2, 280-1, and 442-3.

a political end, represents MacDonald's continuing efforts to raise support for the plight of laboratory animals. In addition to his critique of vivisection, MacDonald discusses another type of suffering that is inflicted on animals—spoiling. This was seen by MacDonald as a more horrific fate for the animal because it affected its spirituality.

As well, this was not MacDonald's first time to support the antivivisection movement. In fact, he was one of the first writers to attack the vivisection issue in a novel. Although other novels, such as Wilkie Collins's *Heart and Science* (1883) and H.G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), are commonly thought of as being the forerunners of antivivisection literature, MacDonald should be credited as having led the way. In his novel, *Paul Faber, Surgeon* (1879), the title character discovers his assistant in the act of vivisecting a dog. Following this episode, MacDonald inserts a fictional sermon, entitled 'The Groans of the Inarticulate'. Though the heart of the sermon is repeated later in 'The Hope of the Universe', its rhetoric is potent and it represents the full extent of MacDonald's passion regarding the cessation of vivisection.

MacDonald produced one other major piece of religious writing, entitled *The Miracles of Our Lord* (1870), a book of religious essays that he dedicated to Maurice. Shortly after its publication, Maurice approached MacDonald and proposed a scheme for the two of them to co-write a book of prayers, hymns, and devotional essays.²⁷ Although the plan never came to fruition, it must have been a great compliment to MacDonald. *The Miracles of Our Lord* is composed of twelve essays analysing the miracles of Christ. Using these essays, MacDonald reveals a portrait of Christ's person and his earthly mission. As well, MacDonald connects the essays using a common theme of divine service. Using this theme, MacDonald implies that all

²⁷ See Maurice's undated letter to MacDonald, in *GMDW*, pp. 398-9.

people are connected to God's divine plan and are intended to become fellow-workers with Christ.

Of the religious essays in *A Dish of Orts* (1893), one is of particular importance to this thesis. In 'True Christian Ministering', MacDonald defines his idea of Christian service.²⁸ This definition is important because it may be used as MacDonald's model for the analysis of nineteenth-century social reform and humanitarianism in his novels. The basis of the essay is fairly simple: man is positioned within two realms—one physical, and the other spiritual. Man is unable to remain in a state of stasis and must either move up or down, as on a scale. These two scales are inversely connected in that a man's place on one scale determines his place on the other. For instance, if a man on the physical scale seeks to serve only himself or force others to serve him, then, although he may rise on the physical scale due to his level of self-importance, he is lowered on the spiritual scale. For MacDonald, the spiritual scale is more important and any focus upon the physical scale is only in reference to how one must emulate the methods of Christ. MacDonald believed that Christ came to mankind in order that he might *serve*, rather than *be served*, and for one to follow Christ, one must also serve others. To illustrate his point, MacDonald describes the scale of service as a pyramid that has been turned upside down and that Christ:

lies at the inverted apex of the pyramid; he upholds, and serves, and ministers unto all, and they who would be high in his kingdom must go near to him at the bottom, to uphold and minister to all that they may or can uphold and minister unto. There is no other law of precedence, no other law of rank and position in God's kingdom. And mind, that is *the* kingdom. (*Orts*, 'True Christian Ministering', 299-300)

Furthermore, MacDonald adds that true service can only come from obedient love, else it is not service but slavery. This is a persistent theme within MacDonald's fiction. Although there are a

²⁸ George MacDonald, 'True Christian Ministering' in *A Dish of Orts* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1893; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2009); cited as *Orts*, pp. 298-312.

few characters innately born with this established virtue (Robert Falconer, Gibbie Galbraith, and Malcolm MacPhail are good examples), all of his characters must realise and accept the divine plan that they must serve others out of love.

Apart from his theological writings, MacDonald published three essays on the imagination: 'The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture' (1867), 'A Sketch of Individual Development' (1880) and 'The Fantastic Imagination' (1893). MacDonald's first essay, 'The Imagination', is instrumental in helping us understand MacDonald's mentality. In the essay, MacDonald theorises that the imagination of man is spiritually linked with the imagination of God. For MacDonald, God is the great Creator, and is ever seeking more expression through a continual act of creation. Thus when man, who is a creation of God, thinks and creates, so is God able to think and create—in this case, through the mind and imaginative spirit of the man. Furthermore, when man attempts to use his imagination to seek out and uncover original truth, he discovers the truth to be centred in God. MacDonald's theory proposes that God uses the human imagination as a tool to aid the spiritual journey of man. This is a pivotal point in MacDonald's theology, which declares that God is 'Home' towards which man is ever journeying.

Much later, MacDonald presents a thematic follow-up to 'The Imagination' where he outlines and defends his theories regarding fantasy fiction: 'The Fantastic Imagination'. Though a relatively simple essay, MacDonald uses it to describe and defend his approach to writing fantasy. The essay is undoubtedly valuable for scholars studying the Victorian fairy tale. MacDonald's primary claim in the essay is that the imagination should be defined as 'new embodiments of old truths' and that Nature may inspire man's imagination towards divine

aspiration.²⁹ Furthermore, MacDonald argues: ‘The best thing you can do for your fellow, next to rousing his conscience, is—not to give him things to think about, but to wake things up that are in him; or say, to make him think things for himself’ (*Orts*, ‘The Fantastic Imagination’, 319). Additionally, MacDonald defends his belief that all literary symbols originate in God and that only what he refers to as a ‘true man’ may draw universal truth from them (*Orts*, ‘The Fantastic Imagination’, 320). MacDonald explains this point thus:

it is God’s things, his embodied thoughts, which alone a man has to use, modified and adapted to his own purposes, for the expression of his thoughts; therefore he cannot help his words and figures falling into such combinations in the mind of another as he had himself not foreseen, so many are the thoughts allied to every other thought, so many are the relations involved in every figure, so many the facts hinted in every symbol. A man may well himself discover truth in what he wrote; for he was dealing all the while with things that came from thoughts beyond his own. (*Orts*, ‘The Fantastic Imagination’, 320-1)

This statement does much to help us understand how MacDonald approached his literature. Believing that all things come from and point towards God, MacDonald suggests that his readers have the ability to locate the ‘truth’ of God in his fiction.

The third major essay of this category is ‘A Sketch of Individual Development’, where MacDonald develops the idea that God’s imagination works through man’s imagination as was proposed in ‘The Imagination’; yet, the ultimate purpose of his ‘Sketch’ is to focus largely upon man as an ever developing, spiritual being. The essay is complex and demonstrates MacDonald’s in-depth perception of the human psyche and its relation to spiritual matters. MacDonald presents a thorough survey of a man’s educational and spiritual development, arguing that the journey of life should be towards God. MacDonald also suggests that man is a divided creature and that this inner division obscures his relationship with God. Thus, each man has within him that which is of God and seeks to return ‘Home’ to God. This God-dependent self is pitted

²⁹ George MacDonald, ‘The Fantastic Imagination’ in *Orts*, pp. 313-22, pp. 314 and 320.

against the independent self, which seeks after his own personal desire (anything which does not progress towards 'Home'). Through obedient service towards his fellow beings, man is able to draw nearer to his ideal self, which is of God, leading MacDonald to proclaim that 'Oneness with God is the sole truth of humanity'.³⁰ Furthermore, MacDonald proposes that when man is in harmony with God, then he is able to achieve harmony with humanity. Only then will he be truly free to serve others. In essence, he then becomes like Christ.

Part Two

MacDonald's Social Views and Ideas

MacDonald and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Change

MacDonald's son, Ronald, once inquired why his father should not 'write a story of mere human passion and artistic plot', and 'whether his highest literary quality was not in a measure injured by what must to many seem the monotony of his theme'.³¹ MacDonald's answer reveals significant insight into how he viewed himself as an author. He attested that he would like to write such a story, but claimed that 'having begun to do his work as a Congregational minister, and having been driven, [...] into giving up that professional pulpit, he was no less impelled than compelled to use unceasingly the new platform whence he had found that his voice could carry so far' (33). In answering Ronald, MacDonald was not thinking, specifically, about social themes. Indeed, social issues are not the main issues in the novels, but they do play a large part.

³⁰ George MacDonald, 'A Sketch of Individual Development' in *Orts*, pp. 43-76, p. 74.

³¹ Ronald MacDonald, *From a Northern Window: A Personal Reminiscence of George MacDonald by His Son*, Masterline Series 1 (Eureka, CA: Sunrise Books, 1989), pp. 32-3.

As we shall see, several of MacDonald's heroes and heroines are philanthropists that work to improve housing standards as well as to make art and green spaces accessible to the urban poor. Furthermore, it is by understanding MacDonald's theology that we may come to a better understanding of his approach to society.

Interestingly, MacDonald's theology was quite controversial during his life. In fact, he was forced to resign from his first and only church pulpit in 1853, just a few years after beginning his career in 1850. His radical beliefs, sometimes considered heretical, were exemplified by suggesting that all humanity may obtain universal salvation, that hell is a place for further spiritual refinement instead of an eternal place of damnation, that there is an afterlife for animals, and that there shall be redemption for the devil.³² Though MacDonald's disappointment must have been exceedingly great when he lost his pulpit, the event helped shape him into the prolific writer he would become. Unwilling to abandon his love for literature, MacDonald embarked upon a new journey as a writer, employing the same romantic idealism as the characters in his novels.

Throughout William Raeper's biography, MacDonald is portrayed as a man continually caught between two opposing worlds: the physical world, which was full of disappointments, bad health, and money problems, and the spiritual world, which was full of dreams, beauty, and passageways leading humanity homewards to God. Raeper also points to Novalis and other German Romantic poets as being responsible for inspiring MacDonald's concept of *færie* (*George MacDonald*, 107-9 and 144-5). Indeed, MacDonald owes a great deal of his creativity to the German Romantic writers, but the influence of the English and Scottish Romantic writers must not be overlooked. As a latter-day Romantic himself, MacDonald's own interpretation of the world is infused with romantic idealism. Thus, it would seem that MacDonald would have

³² For detailed accounts of MacDonald's ministry and early theology, see *GMDW*, pp. 135-42, 154-9, and 177-87.

been more at ease with the dream-like world of *færie* and would have tried to escape or at least have been repelled by the clamorous turmoil of the nineteenth century.

A different point seems to arise, however, when one reads MacDonald's non-fantasy novels. In fact, MacDonald appears to be quite concerned with the suffering throughout the physical world and did much to improve it: not by encouraging his readers that a dream world exists for them to escape within, but, instead, by prompting them to find a way in which the spiritual world and the physical world may come together. MacDonald thought that such a connection would be possible, and the surest way this could be achieved was by instilling within his readers some inner desire to work for the good of humanity. Despite MacDonald's popularity nowadays as a fantasy writer, solidifying his reputation as an important progenitor of the Victorian fairy tale, he was, at the core of his literary career, a novelist who sometimes combined the literary modes of realism and romance as a method of critiquing his society, as well as instructing his readers in ways that may improve their lives and their community. Specifically, his novels present a world where ideal Christian heroes serve as examples for others to follow. Much like Christ's disciples, the heroes in these novels are given some work to accomplish which directly contributes to the betterment of humanity and their duties inspire a few of them to be social workers or physicians—sometimes a combination of both. His settings are sometimes recognisable, such as major metropolitan centres like London or Aberdeen, whereas other places are invented from his Scottish heritage.

Although the term is problematic, MacDonald's non-fantasy novels are too often labelled 'realistic'. Yet, his novels are actually more complex, for their structure is rooted in romance and their intention is to suggest what society could and should be. To label MacDonald's output as

novels of realism would be to deny the apparent theological perspective through which MacDonald approached in his writings.

Indeed, when viewed as works of realism, MacDonald's novels seem to be weak, as evidenced by the opinions of Robert Lee Wolff and Richard Reis.³³ Though the novels sometimes do provide a detailed analysis of Victorian culture and everyday life, there is an obvious spiritual essence that permeates the whole structure. His characters move on a physical plane, but their actions are governed by spiritual forces. Thus, it would be more appropriate to categorise MacDonald as a romantic-realist.

Considering MacDonald's spiritual perspectives as well as his literary tastes, it is no wonder that he attempted to combine realism and romance to illustrate his social concerns. Though MacDonald's experiences were shaped by his life in the Victorian city (mostly London), his imaginative development was fuelled by his spirituality.

Indeed, the nineteenth century was an extraordinary time of change with many developments in industrialism, science, and social politics. Walter E. Houghton points out that the nineteenth century was *an age of transition*: 'For although all ages are in ages of transition, never before had men thought of their own time as an era of change *from* the past *to* the future. Indeed, in England that idea and the Victorian period began together'.³⁴ Houghton also suggests:

In the years between 1830 and 1870 the sense of crisis at the very moment when the traditional authority of the church and the aristocracy was breaking down, impelled men of letters to focus on the contemporary scene more consciously [...] than they had ever done before; and then, in the light of their analysis, to urge the adoption of one or another political, religious, or moral philosophy. (xvi)

And so it was that Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, and so many other nineteenth-century novelists documented their transitional age as if they were in a *crisis of*

³³ See, especially, Reis, pp. 27-8 and 106.

³⁴ Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1957), p. 1.

change. MacDonald also documented this crisis with his writings and therefore stands alongside this group of writers, though his novels have yet to be discussed in this way.

Indeed, MacDonald was a successful novelist at the height of his career and his novels, like those of his contemporaries, did much to illustrate what was actually occurring at the time. MacDonald witnessed the expansion of the British Empire as it reached across the globe; he observed the historical and biological findings theorised by modern scientists; he felt the trembling collapse of religious faith. Thus, for us to better understand MacDonald as a novelist, we must try to understand what he thought of his society and time period.

Christopher Dawson tells us that the nineteenth century ‘was the classical age of humanitarianism’ but it seemed to create new problems as it was solving others.³⁵ Dawson’s depiction of the century is suggestive of *Jekyll and Hyde* for it:

created slums as well as drains, and sweated industries as well as Factory Acts. And therefore the social consciousness of the age was also a guilty conscience, so that the concern for humanitarian reform and social justice was also a sign of repentance and a way of atonement. (247)

If we consider Dawson’s assessment of the nineteenth century in light of this thesis, then we must look to how MacDonald’s conscience responded towards certain societal problems and issues in his writings.

Our first step brings us to MacDonald’s spirituality. Indeed, his works are permeated with what he believes should be the Christian response for the betterment of society. As well, MacDonald’s spiritual themes set his fiction apart from the novels of his contemporaries. At the same time, his novels are a reaction to the age of transition of which he was a part. MacDonald’s spirituality suggests that an active faith is needed to counter the truths of pain and suffering. Although the fantasy writings reveal MacDonald’s religious psyche through the use of symbols

³⁵ Christopher Dawson, ‘The Humanitarians’ in *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians: An Historic Revaluation of the Victorian Age* (London: Sylvan Press, n.d.), pp. 247-53, p. 247.

and allegory, it is within the pages of his seemingly ‘realistic’ novels that he most succeeds at presenting what he felt might be a Christian, yet practical, approach towards the betterment of society. Certainly, the imaginative cities in *The Princess and Curdie* (1883) and *Lilith* (1895) might serve as allegorical representations of the ‘metropolis’, but MacDonald makes his point more intimate when he leaves fairyland behind and focuses instead on recognising and exposing the spiritual and physical decay in places such as London or Aberdeen within his novels.

MacDonald’s novels were also a response to the Condition-of-England novels popularised throughout the 1840s and 1850s. The most common examples of these are Kingsley’s *Alton Locke* (1850), Dickens’s *Hard Times* (1854), and Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855). The phrase originated in Carlyle’s *Chartism* (1839). In the introduction, Carlyle attempts to raise literary awareness regarding the problems of the working classes by writing:

To us individually this matter appears, and has for many years appeared, to be the most ominous of all practical matters whatever; a matter in regard to which if something be not done, something will *do* itself one day, and in a fashion that will please nobody. The time is verily come for acting in it; how much more for consultation about acting in it, for speech and articulate inquiry about it!³⁶

The ‘us’ in which Carlyle places himself, is the group that has become aware of the nation’s predicament, whether by statistical evidence or by feelings of guilt. Carlyle’s assertion inspired the Condition-of-England novelists to explore working class problems.

Although MacDonald’s novels are not Condition-of-England novels, they share certain similarities with them, especially with regards to the treatment of Nature and the problems of the city as the following two chapters will argue. Likewise, the heroes in *Robert Falconer* (1868), *Guild Court* (1868), and *Sir Gibbie* (1879), are faced with specific societal problems such as mass poverty, alcoholism, and other degradations which have produced a loss of faith within the people. As MacDonald criticises the city, emphasis is placed upon Nature as a spiritual, healing

³⁶ Thomas Carlyle, *Chartism* (London: Chapman and Hall, n.d.), Chapter I, ‘Condition-of-England Question’, p. 3.

force which shapes and inspires the intellectual growth of his heroes. Those who reside in the city are depicted as though they had isolated themselves from a place of refuge and must, therefore, fend for themselves. This is a romantic, Wordsworthian feature which MacDonald uses in order to suggest that his country-born heroes have a peculiar closeness to God which is not obtainable in the city. The characters' time in Nature inspires them to develop an idealised view of mankind as well as a perception that the physical world is ever linked with an unseen spiritual world. During the course of the novel, these heroes relocate to a city, such as London or Aberdeen, bringing their reformatory ideals with them. Interestingly, the portrayal of Nature as a spiritual place is easier to detect in his Scottish novels, especially in his first non-fantasy novel, *David Elginbrod* (1863), where the young female heroine, Margaret Elginbrod, seeks solitude in the woods so that she might pray. Similarly, other characters, such as the heroes in *Robert Falconer* (1868) and *Wilfrid Cumbermede* (1872), find God during mountain-top experiences.³⁷

The spiritual element of Nature is not so apparent in the English novels. Instead, the primary setting is typically London. Thus, MacDonald's English protagonists must either escape the city and seek God in Nature or locate a quiet place within the city that allows them to connect with God, as is the case with Lucy Burton in *Guild Court*. With these novels, MacDonald suggests that there is great division between Nature and the city. All in all, similar themes emerge in both the English and Scottish novels—emphasising a spiritual journey to God by means of humanitarian service to others. Thus, the novels demonstrate various means by which MacDonald places significant weight upon poor social conditions in the Victorian city.

It is of great significance to know that MacDonald was a fierce opponent of nineteenth-century capitalism which he felt was the pursuit of *mammon*. The term, *mammon*, is used

³⁷ These are discussed in Chapter Three.

throughout the thesis and is interpreted as MacDonald would have his readers understand it. The term derives from Christ's 'Sermon on the Mount':

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? [...] But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6.24-34)

Though MacDonald uses the term throughout his fiction and religious writings, his best expression of what he means by it is illustrated in the novel, *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood* (1867), which contains the fictional sermon entitled simply 'Sermon on God and Mammon'. In his 'sermon', MacDonald writes:

Mammon, you know, means *riches*. Now, riches are meant to be the slave—not even the servant of man, and not to be the master. If a man serve [sic] his own servant, or, in a word, any one who has no just claim to be his master, he is a slave. But here he serves his own slave.³⁸

In contrast to this idea of slavery, MacDonald claims that the simple act of serving God is 'freedom', and only by submission to the service of God does one find the ability to be freed from the bondage of *mammon* (*Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*, Chapter XI, 'Sermon on God and Mammon', 193). MacDonald also claims that one's service to God must not be identified with slavery: 'To serve is the highest, noblest calling in creation. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, yea, with Himself' (*Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*, Chapter XI, 'Sermon on God and Mammon', 193).

Mimicking the examples given by Carlyle and Dickens, MacDonald points to *mammon* as a means to express the canker of society's problems. By doing this, MacDonald provides us with some necessary clues to interpret his mindset. Styling his novels thus, MacDonald responds to the Condition-of-England phenomenon whilst incorporating a spiritual, romantic formula to

³⁸ George MacDonald, *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1867; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2004), Chapter XI, 'Sermon on God and Mammon', p. 193.

create a social novel. Although MacDonald avoids describing the inner workings of a Victorian factory or workhouse, he offers, in tremendous detail, the weighty consequences of an overgrown city upon the shoulders of the working poor. This issue is especially noticeable in the novel *Guild Court*, which depicts the consequences of urban noise and pollution on a young child named Mattie. As Chapter Three will argue, her only hope resides in the endeavours of Lucy Burton, the novel's heroine, who takes her out of the city and brings her into contact with Nature.

Transitions between Town and Country in MacDonald's Novels

The Industrial Revolution physically altered the natural face of Britain. As the nation was becoming a metropolitan state, many rural residents moved their families into the already overcrowded cities such as Manchester, Birmingham, and Liverpool.³⁹ This mass and rapid movement from the country to the city became one of the major themes of the Condition-of-England novels in the 1840s-50s. Walter E. Houghton writes that this move created a sort of schism in the nineteenth century:

The modern city was the creation and the symbol of liberal-industrial society. When the ties that had bound men to their country neighbors and their ancestral village were snapped by the exodus to the factory towns and metropolitan London, the sense of community was permanently lost. (79)

This schism between rural and urban communities is apparent in MacDonald's novels. Several of his novels symbolise the *rural* as a state of *Eden*, marking it as a place lost in both space and time. They reveal that he was aware of this communal schism and that he questioned if a lost sense of *ruralness* could be retained. These novels tend to tell the story of a hero, beginning with his childhood and ending with his relocation to an urban setting. The reason for these relocations

³⁹ For population growth statistics regarding these cities in the nineteenth century, see Anthony S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 3-4 and 305-6.

is usually for education; yet, an underlying idea emerges suggesting that the hero's youth has ended and the return to his *Eden* is sometimes blocked. As a result, the characters of such novels must adjust to urban life by storing a sense of *home* within their consciousness. The idea of internalising one's *home* was precisely what MacDonald had to do. He never returned to live permanently in his idyllic Scotland after he left it for a metropolitan England.

The title character in *Robert Falconer* (1868) moves to London so that he might find his wayward father and bring him back to his grandmother. In his success, Robert not only restores his broken family but he also restores his lost Eden. However, Robert chooses not to remain in Scotland, but to return instead to London and recommence the social work he had previously begun.

In contrast, Malcolm is ostracised by his home community after he goes to London in *The Marquis of Lossie* (1877). According to a character known as 'Blue Peter', Malcolm has become dazzled by the city, which, consequently, leads him to sin against his religion. Peter is a minor character who travels to London with Malcolm, and after accidentally attending a theatre (thinking, initially, that it is a church), flees back to Scotland and informs his community of what he believes to be Malcolm's spiritual degradation. In this novel, MacDonald creates an idea of conflict, implying that the problem lies not with Malcolm's evolution in the city, but with his community's rejection of him due to his stay in London.

In some novels, the rural/urban schism occurs, but the hero is unable to adjust to the metropolis and retreats back to his origins. Thus, the transition from a rural to an urban environment is illustrated differently depending on a character's spiritual state. For instance, characters who are emotionally and spiritually mature, such as Robert Falconer, Malcolm MacPhail, Alexander Graham, and Gibbie Galbraith, respond to a sense of social duty once they

enter the metropolis. Characters less mature appear to stumble. Characters, such as Alec Forbes in *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (1865), Walter Colman in *Home Again* (1887), and Malcolm's half-sister, Florimel, in *The Marquis of Lossie*, are good examples of this type because they do not feel a sense of duty to minister to the physical or spiritual needs of the city's occupants. Instead of entering the city as a place to do what MacDonald would consider 'God's work', they use their time in the city to pursue their own self-interests, which typically lands them in some kind of moral dilemma. Eventually, they discover that they have erred and must retreat back to the country for the sake of their spiritual well-being (or at least to grow up a little more).

However, the idea that a character is fully capable of returning to his rural origin is an uncommon one in the Victorian novel. Characters such as Pip from *Great Expectations* (1861) and Jude Fawley from *Jude the Obscure* (1895) remind us that once *home* is left, it may never be regained. Indeed, Pip may have benefitted from his education and experience in London, but he is no longer able to have a genuine relationship with Joe and his family. In a much darker sense, Jude's desire to relocate from the rural Marygreen to the metropolitan Christminster for the purpose of becoming a scholar is, in the end, a death wish. George Eliot's *Silas Marner* (1861) suggests a similar idea, but, in her novel, there is a profound twist of fate. The disgrace and pain Silas suffers caused by the separation from his original (unnamed) town is eventually healed with a new *home* in Raveloe. This realisation occurs years later when he returns and is astonished to find that the place of his disgrace has been replaced by a factory.⁴⁰ In fact, his old home has become an industrial city that he no longer recognises. After he returns to Raveloe, Silas recounts his visit to a friend, saying 'The old place is all swep' away [...]. The old home's gone; I've no home but this now' (315).

⁴⁰ George Eliot, *Silas Marner, the Weaver of Raveloe* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1861; reprinted by London: Macmillan, n.d.), p. 315.

Issues such as these raise a variety of discussions. For instance, the idea of a character's *restoration* and his *return* suggests MacDonald's spiritual theory that man must return *home* to God. Eden, for MacDonald, has become an unattainable place locked away in time and space; instead, God becomes the true destination. We find this idea in MacDonald's earliest publications. A character in *Phantastes* (1858) sings:

Thou goest thine, and I go mine—
 Many ways we wend;
 Many days, and many ways,
 Ending in one end.

Many a wrong, and its curing song;
 Many a road, and many an inn;
 Room to roam, but only one home
 For all the world to win.⁴¹

Furthermore, this idea reminds us of the biblical tale of the 'Prodigal Son' (Luke 15.11-32).

The biblical tale is important in this study for two reasons. First, it was, quite arguably, MacDonald's favourite story. He consistently reinvents it time and again throughout his writing, marking its significance. Second, the tale evokes nostalgia. Pondering his present state of affairs in light of his past, the young prodigal realises that he actually needs his father; furthermore, the moral of the tale reveals that the greatest need of a wayward child is to simply return home to his parents. That he supposedly 'sinned' against his father is irrelevant; it is the act of turning around and going home that makes the story so important to MacDonald, for he would have interpreted it as an allegorical representation of his personal religion.

MacDonald's first major publication, a long dramatic poem entitled *Within and Without* (1855), is basically an elaborate reinvention of the biblical story.⁴² Yet, MacDonald's best attempt at re-creating the biblical story can be seen with the aptly-named novel, *Home Again*,

⁴¹ George MacDonald, *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women* (London: Smith, Elder, 1858; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2000), Chapter XXII, p. 285-6.

⁴² George MacDonald, *Within and Without: A Dramatic Poem in PW1*, pp. 1-131; see Part III, scene III, pp. 56-9 and Part IV, scene XXII, p. 119.

where the young protagonist, Walter Colman, practically flees from his father's farm in order to pursue personal fame as a writer in London. After many adventures and various trials with the London literati, all of which MacDonald uses to challenge his protagonist, Walter sees himself as a failure and discovers that he is utterly alone. MacDonald writes:

He began to learn how insufficient he was for himself; how little self-sustaining power there was in him. Not there was the fountain of life! Words that had been mere platitudes of theological commonplace, began to show a golden root through their ancient mould. The time came back to him when father and mother bent anxiously over their child. He remembered how their love took from him all fear; how even the pain seemed to melt in their presence; all was right when they knew all about it! they would see that the suffering went at the proper time! All gentle ministrations to his comfort, the moving of his pillows, the things cooked by his mother's own hands, her watch to play with—all came back, as if the tide of life had set in the other direction, and he was fast drifting back into childhood.⁴³

This remembrance alters Walter's mentality and he finally returns home to his father. Though ill and delirious, Walter falls at his father's feet, uttering the words: 'Father, I have sinned...not worthy...' (*HA*, Chapter XXVIII, 'Doing and Dreaming', 175). Walter's confession mirrors the prodigal's claim: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son' (Luke 15.21). The biblical tale continues to unfold in MacDonald's novel with Walter being tightly clutched in his father's arms. Along with the restored relationship to his father, Walter is restored with a young lady named Molly, his first love whom he also left behind when he went to London. She tells him: 'you don't want to be a finer gentleman than your father! Stay at home and help him, and grow strong. Plough and cart, and do the work of a laboring man. Nature will be your mate in her own workshop!' (*HA*, Chapter XXXI, 'This Picture and This', 201-2).

By the end of the novel, Walter has come full circle, abandoning his desire for literary fame, ploughing his father's fields and composing verse in the evenings—much like Robert

⁴³ George MacDonald, *Home Again* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1887; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2003); cited as *HA*, Chapter XXVI, 'A Period', pp. 164-5.

Burns before he became an exciseman. Using the tale of the prodigal son, MacDonald attempts to remind his readers that worldly ambition is futile; true happiness can only be found at home. Yet, it must also be remembered that MacDonald never returned to Scotland unless he was visiting family, researching material for his novels, or giving lectures. Like so many of his peers, the return to his rural origin was a choice he refused to make.

A unique spin that MacDonald sometimes places upon this theme is that the idea of home is not always what it seems to be. In his children's fantasy novel, *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), MacDonald constructs a highly imaginative tale wherein a young child named Diamond meets a mysterious female entity named North Wind who carries him off on several adventures. Over time, Diamond grows older and leaves the house where he spent his childhood. Near the end of the novel, desiring to see this same house again, Diamond begs North Wind to take him to see it once more. She does so, but Diamond is hardly prepared for what he finds in the place that he remembers. Instead of the thoughts and feelings he once experienced and sought to rekindle, he only finds that his former home is nothing more than an empty shell; it is the memory of home which provides Diamond with joy, not the physical place itself. At first, Diamond is distraught, but he soon comes to the truth of the matter when he declares: 'I suppose it's only the people in it that make you like a place, and when they're gone, it's dead, and you don't care a bit about it'.⁴⁴ This realisation echoes words given earlier in the novel when MacDonald writes, 'it is not fine things that make a home a nice place but your mother and your father' (*ABNW*, Chapter III, 'Old Diamond', 29).

Other characters must find ways of taking their *homes* with them through life. Alexander Graham, the noble schoolmaster and 'stickit minister' in *Malcolm* and *The Marquis of Lossie*, is

⁴⁴ George MacDonald, *At the Back of the North Wind* (London: Strahan, 1871; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2002); cited as *ABNW*, Chapter XXXVII, 'Once More', p. 373.

a good example of this sort. Graham is a Scotsman who greatly resembles his author; both men desired a pulpit ministry and due to their controversial theologies, both failed in their religious careers. However, by the end of *Malcolm*, Graham's theology is responsible for having expelled him from his academic duties as schoolmaster and he leaves Scotland for London. In *The Marquis of Lossie*, Graham and his former pupil, Malcolm, are reunited. Though he lives in poverty and greatly misses his home country, Graham relies on his past memories to help him to feel content with his present life. Graham states: 'I do miss the air, and the laverocks (*skylarks*), and the gowans, [...] but I have them all in my mind, and at my age a man ought to be able to satisfy himself with the idea of a thing in his soul'.⁴⁵ He then quotes from Wordsworth's poem, 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' (1807), to illustrate the nature of his contentment. Furthermore, not only does his contentment help him to realise that his true home lies not in his past but in God, it also helps him to grow spiritually closer to God (*ML*, Chapter XXI, 'Mr Graham', 77).

In contrast, Dr Anderson, in *Robert Falconer*, chooses to remain in the city though he is never fully capable of relinquishing his rural origins. Dr Anderson spent most of his life travelling the world and lived for many years in India; yet, in a rather sentimental fashion, he styles his bedroom to mirror that of a sparse Scottish room, similar to the one that his father fashioned for him when he was a youth. Additionally, though he speaks English throughout the novel, Dr Anderson resorts to using Broad Scots as he draws nearer to his death. MacDonald describes the change thus:

The face of his ancestors, the noble, sensitive, heart-full, but rugged, bucolic, and weather-beaten through centuries of windy ploughing, hail-stormed sheep-keeping, long-paced seed-sowing, and multiform labour, surely not less honourable in the sight of the

⁴⁵ George MacDonald, *The Marquis of Lossie* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1877; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2004); cited as *ML*, Chapter XXI, 'Mr Graham', p. 76.

working God than the fighting of the noble, came back in the face of the dying physician. From that hour to his death he spoke the rugged dialect of his fathers.⁴⁶

Presented as a wise character and benefactor towards the youthful Robert Falconer, Dr Anderson refuses to forget the life his father began for him. Though circumstance removed him from his Scottish origins, the essence of home remained with him.

MacDonald must have known that the Scotland of his childhood was unattainable. Throughout his life, he observed the gradual development of not only rural Britain, but also his birthplace in Aberdeenshire, as wealthy landowners purchased smaller farms. David S. Robb suggests that MacDonald and others, ‘were profoundly disturbed by change driven by economic considerations, to what they regarded as the detriment of the social structure of Scottish rural life when the “patriarchal” (as they often termed it) relation of landlord and tenant was denied’.⁴⁷ This is the core idea in *What’s Mine’s Mine* (1886), a later novel that discusses the breakup and removal of the Macruadh Clan from their Highland home. The novel concludes with the characters learning that the Highlands are no longer theirs; and like George Eliot’s weaver, they must realise that *home* lies within.

During MacDonald’s day, all roads led to London. Although not an industrial city such as those which had emerged in the north of England, London had been in a state of perpetual growth since the time of Shakespeare. Raymond Williams notes that ‘London was already a city of half a million inhabitants in 1660, [...]. Between 1700 and 1820 it rose to a million and a quarter’.⁴⁸ This growth became a major topic of discussion amongst writers, especially the

⁴⁶ George MacDonald, *Robert Falconer* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1868; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2005); cited as *RF*, Part III, Chapter IV, ‘The Doctor’s Death’, pp. 418-9.

⁴⁷ David S. Robb, ed., *Huntly in Former Days: Two Studies of Huntly’s Past* (n.p.: The George MacDonald Society, 1998), pp. 6-7.

⁴⁸ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p. 146; as well, see Anthony S. Wohl, *The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2002), pp. 1-2.

British Romantic writers who were at odds with one another when it came to depicting London. According to Williams, Blake's vision of the city is spiritual—'to build the holy as against the unholy city', whereas Wordsworth's vision is developed 'with his country experience behind him' (149). With this experience, Williams argues, Wordsworth discovers 'a new way of seeing men in what is experienced as a new kind of society' and is thus faced with 'a new kind of alienation' (150). As Peter Coveney notes, Wordsworth commanded a powerful influence upon his century. Coveney argues that Wordsworth's

antithesis of town and country became of increasing importance to a century disfigured by the urban outrage of the Industrial Revolution. His plea for a sensuous relation between Man and Nature became a force among a whole generation of intellectuals at the end of the [nineteenth] century dissatisfied with the human sterilities of the vulgarizers of Benthamite utilitarianism. His assertion for the power of the imaginative life [...] became a potent romantic influence.⁴⁹

If we apply these ideas to our discussion, then most Victorian novelists expanded upon Blake's view. Though the city itself was by no means portrayed by them as a holy site, it was, nevertheless, depicted by some as a civilised congregation of potential progress and by others (such as the Condition-of-England novelists) as a realm of chaos, ever on the verge of devouring its own people. Though retreating to Nature may have been desirable, it was no longer an option.

What we find in MacDonald's novels is an expression of a haunted past. Similar expressions occur throughout the works of other Victorian novelists who grappled with the rural/urban schism. Their ruralised childhoods, Houghton suggests:

became the nostalgia for a lost world of peace and companionship, of healthy bodies and quiet minds. The image had its basis in memory, for every Victorian in the city had either grown up in the country or in a town small enough for ready contact with the rural environment. (79)

Yet, these Victorians had relocated to the city and were forced to face the reality that the country, despite its rustic charms, was no longer theirs. Thus, when MacDonald recreates Huntly (his

⁴⁹ Peter Coveney, *The Image of Childhood: The Individual and Society: A Study of the Theme in English Literature*, rev. edn (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1967), p. 83.

hometown) as Glamerton in *Alec Forbes of Howglen* or Rothieden in *Robert Falconer*, we find them set in his personal past, thirty to forty years earlier. The ideas of Huntly and his Scottish childhood were not only elements of nostalgia for MacDonald but they were symbolic places of safety. William Raeper writes:

If Turriepuffit [a fictional Scottish estate in *David Elginbrod*] is a figment summoned from MacDonald's childhood, it is a world suffused with the glow of Burns and Ossian and Wordsworth—literally a Glamour-town [Glamerton is a fictional Scottish town in *Alec Forbes of Howglen*] enchanted by the transforming magic of nostalgia—a world that had slipped away forever. Turriepuffit, the distant, Scottish idyll is more than a description, it is a place where nature is able to exercise her charms unhindered and Wordsworthian sentiments flow out of every hill and fir-tree.

Such a romantic view of nature as a divine educative mediator is central to MacDonald's vision and encounters with nature are always key points in the development of MacDonald's characters. (*George MacDonald*, 184-5)

Indeed, MacDonald was no exception to the rest of those in his century who had been displaced from a rural childhood to an urban adulthood.

Furthermore, despite his earlier fascination with the metropolis, he was also horrified by its physical degradation and, more importantly, his belief that it had the formidable ability to degrade its residents. MacDonald expressed his attraction/repulsion to the city in a letter to his wife describing Edinburgh. It was the first time MacDonald had ever visited it and he spent the day wandering through the old town, which, he writes:

has *all* the attraction for me. [...] But the Canongate and the Cowgate! oh such houses! oh filth! and misery! and smells! and winding common stairs! and *grated* unglazed windows on all the landings! and squalid figures looking down from two, three, four, five, six, seven stories! ('Letter to Louisa MacDonald, 2 July 1855', in *GMDW*, 228-9)

MacDonald continues by relating his abhorrence regarding the residents whom he discovered loitering within the narrow alleyways: 'Some of the dark *closes* and entries look most infernal, and in the dim light you could see something swarming, children or grown people perhaps, almost falling away from the outlined definiteness of the human' ('Letter to Louisa MacDonald, 2 July 1855', in *GMDW*, 229). Indeed, the physical nature of Edinburgh's 'Old Town' was

peculiarly dilapidated by the middle of the century, making it look like a frightful place. Yet, what is most remarkable about this letter is that after MacDonald describes such striking horrors, he fears that such descriptions of a place and its people may frighten his wife. He then begins to assure her of her safety in her ‘orderly *clean* commonplace well-behaved Manchester’ and reminds her that their God is a god of Nature: ‘God, the Sky God—the Green Earth God be with you; *our own God*, as David says’ (‘Letter to Louisa MacDonald, 2 July 1855’, in *GMDW*, 229).

Two important ideas regarding MacDonald’s Edinburgh letter are significant to this discussion. The first is that despite the fact that MacDonald occupied Aberdeen, London, and Manchester, before his initial visit to Edinburgh in 1855, it was not until this visit that he truly recognised what the metropolis could be capable of doing to the physical landscape as well as the spiritual state of humanity. This idea disturbed him. By assuming that such descriptions would frighten his wife, he reveals, too, his own fears. As well, his return to Manchester and his eventual residence in London would forever remind him that the city could be a place of physical and spiritual ruin. The descriptions of Manchester in his poem, ‘A Manchester Poem’ (1871), reveal not an ‘orderly *clean* commonplace well-behaved Manchester’, but a polluted place where

the smoke is caught,
And spreads diluted in the cloud, and sinks,
A black precipitate, on miry streets.
And faces gray glide through the darkened fog.⁵⁰

The only evidence of God’s presence in the poem is found in Nature, outside the city. The novels carry similar descriptions of either Aberdeen or London.

Secondly, MacDonald, in his letter, speaks of Nature when he writes of God. MacDonald does not wish his wife to feel overwhelmed by the horror of the city and reminds her to think of

⁵⁰ George MacDonald, ‘A Manchester Poem’ in *PW1*, pp. 422-9, p. 422, lines 3-6.

Nature. Thus, MacDonald professes his belief that Nature not only has the ability to restore the Earth but that it also has the divine power to heal the troubled spirit of man.

In MacDonald's novels, he theorised that God seeks harmony with man through his presence in Nature. MacDonald's interpretation of Wordsworth's major works such as *The Excursion* (1814) and *The Prelude* (1850) led him to believe that obtaining this union with God comes, first, through seeking harmony with Nature and, second, by loving service, as opposed to obligatory service, to others. In his Scottish novels, MacDonald's male 'hero' characters illustrate these phases as they become more spiritually advanced, as was discussed above. Yet, his English novels are quite different. The novels in this category, such as *Guild Court* (1868), *The Vicar's Daughter* (1872), *Mary Marston* (1881), and *Weighed and Wanting* (1882), present female 'heroines' that begin life in the city and must establish some form of literary contact with Nature, usually by reading a volume of Wordsworth along with the Bible. MacDonald must have felt that his society had lost the ability to read the 'book' of Nature and so it required the guidance of Wordsworth, Nature's 'High Priest'. Prompted by the spiritual power of Nature, MacDonald's heroines seek to bring about some form of moral reformation within the city by targeting, not its leaders and political systems, but its poor inhabitants, restoring a sense of spiritual renewal within the metropolis.

The Ills of Industrialism in *The Princess and Curdie* and *St. George and St. Michael*

MacDonald resided within an industrial society and lived several years in Manchester between 1853 and 1857. Strangely, MacDonald never cast Manchester as a primary setting for any of his novels, although it is portrayed in 'A Manchester Poem' (1871), where he discusses the negative consequences of industrialism on the lives of a lower-class working family.

Interestingly, one notices a peculiar absence of industrialism in the novels. Never do we find genuine depictions of factories, mills, or workhouses that can be found in the novels of Dickens, Kingsley, and George Eliot. This absence seems to suggest that MacDonald was not so much interested in the products of industrialism, but was more concerned, instead, with the negative effects it could have on the spiritual condition of society.

Perhaps the closest MacDonald comes to depicting *industrialism* is with the mine that we find in *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) and its sequel, *The Princess and Curdie* (1883). The featured mine in these books is a multifaceted place. In *The Princess and the Goblin*, the mine provides work for Curdie (the story's hero) and his father. The primary use for the mine is to help finance the kingdom, but there are two specified dangers lurking deep within it. The first consists of the leaks, for which the miners must always remain alert. This is a natural danger to the lives of the workers. But there is another danger which threatens the kingdom at large. Not only is the mine home to the ore and precious stones sought by the miners, but it is also home to goblins, a dwarfed race of beings that were once human. Their greed for *mammon* urged them to dig deep into the mines where they eventually degenerated into a subhuman race of goblins, having lost touch with Nature above ground. If the kingdom is not carefully ruled, then the same fate may apply to its subjects. This is precisely the danger that occurs in *The Princess and Curdie*. Thus, by looking closer, we discover that MacDonald's attention is sometimes drawn towards the ills of materialism, but it is only in regards to the threat it poses to the spiritual good of humanity.

The first chapter of *The Princess and Curdie* is entitled 'The Mountain'. Near the beginning, MacDonald writes:

A mountain is a strange and awful thing. In old times, without knowing so much of their strangeness and awfulness as we do, people were yet more afraid of mountains. But then somehow they had not come to see how beautiful they are as well as awful, and they

hated them—and what people hate they must fear. Now that we have learned to look at them with admiration, perhaps we do not always feel quite awe enough of them. To me they are beautiful terrors.⁵¹

Following this, MacDonald begins a rather eloquent discourse personifying the mountain and the *life* of which it is composed, revealing a fine knowledge of natural geology. This discourse concludes with MacDonald's depiction of the mountain as a treasure chest, full of valuable ores and precious stones. The comparison is also extended to include the image of a mother who offers these treasures to 'her children', encouraging them to enter therein and to bring out whatever they may find (*PC*, Chapter I, 'The Mountain', 13). Avoiding any language suggestive of greed, Nature, symbolised with the image of the mountain, is here personified as an active benefactor to mankind. With this, MacDonald writes that the mountain and its hidden mines, full of treasure, is the property of the king, claiming:

He was a real king—that is, one who ruled for the good of his people and not to please himself, and he wanted the silver not to buy rich things for himself, but to help him to govern the country, and pay the ones that defended it from certain troublesome neighbours, and the judges whom he set to portion out righteousness among the people, that so they might learn it themselves, and come to do without judges at all. Nothing that could be got from the heart of the earth could have been put to better purposes than the silver the king's miners got for him. (*PC*, Chapter I, 'The Mountain', 14)

Thus, the mined treasures are for their own benefit as a whole; but there are certain individuals, MacDonald continues, who do not wish to share the wealth. MacDonald writes: 'There were people in the country who, when it came into their hands, degraded it by locking it up in a chest, and then it grew diseased and was called *mammon*, and bred all sorts of quarrels' (*PC*, Chapter I, 'The Mountain', 14). By the end of the novel, this *perversion* of treasure to *mammon* actually occurs.

What MacDonald is suggesting is that although man has the potential to find God in Nature, he also has the ability to find evil. Furthermore, what he finds is simply a representation

⁵¹ George MacDonald, *The Princess and Curdie* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1883; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2005); cited as *PC*, Chapter I, 'The Mountain', p. 9.

of his inner self. MacDonald makes a similar comparison when he suggests that spiritual truths may be discovered in what he has written—it all depends upon the spiritual state of the interpreter: ‘If he be not a true man, he will draw evil out of the best [...]. If he be a true man, he will imagine true things’ (*Orts*, ‘The Fantastic Imagination’, 320). MacDonald’s theory rests on the idea that a personal connection with God separates the ‘true’ man from one that is *untrue*.

In his discussion of the city of Gwyntystorm and the nature of its society in *The Princess and Curdie*, Wolff claims that MacDonald ‘is satirizing the England of his day’ (177). This may be true. However, Wolff goes on to claim that ‘In all he wrote, this is almost his only piece of direct political comment’ (177). Indeed, this fantasy novel is, quite arguably, MacDonald’s personal attack against his nation’s industrial fervour. But this is not the only occasion when MacDonald launches a political attack. A much stronger example is to be found, of all places, in MacDonald’s most unusual novel, *St. George and St. Michael* (1876).

St. George and St. Michael is the only historical novel MacDonald ever wrote. Most likely, its creation had been inspired by Scott’s *Waverley* novels. The story, cast during the First English Civil War (1642-46), tells of the adventures of Richard Heywood and Dorothy Vaughan. Ironically, the young couple, who were once childhood friends and have formed a loving attachment with each other, are now divided in politics and religion. Richard fights on the side of the Parliamentarians while Dorothy’s allegiance remains with the Royalists. However, after a series of struggles which test their faith, they eventually return to one another.

Incredibly, of all the novels, it is here, in this historical novel, that we find MacDonald’s most direct attack on the ills of nineteenth-century industrialism. One of the novel’s characters, Thomas Herbert, appears to be a latter-day Leonardo da Vinci; not only is he skilled in art and poetry, but he is also an inventor. His inventions, such as steam and water-powered machines,

pave the way for industrial mechanisms of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. MacDonald, in the novel's final chapter, expresses his feelings regarding the nineteenth century and suggests that the seventeenth century was a Golden Age for technology because its technology was not yet a vehicle of *mammon*. He argues that the technology of his century is a sign of spiritual reversion or degeneration because it is driven by *mammon* worshippers. In his closing chapter, MacDonald's rhetoric becomes suddenly bitter:

Little did Lord Herbert dream of the age he was initiating—of the irreverence and pride and destruction that were about to follow in his footsteps, wasting, defiling, scarring, obliterating, turning beauty into ashes, and worse! That divine mechanics should thus, through selfishness and avarice, be leagued with filth and squalor and ugliness. [...] What would the inventor of the water-commanding engine have said to the pollution of our waters, the destruction of the very landmarks of our history, the desecration of ruins that ought to be venerated for their loveliness as well as their story! Would he not have broken it to pieces, that the ruin it must occasion might not be laid to his charge?⁵²

With this declaration, MacDonald is clearly pointing out that the nineteenth century has not sought harmony with Nature, but has conquered it and, consequently, stripped Britain of both its serene beauty and its natural resources. It is also interesting to note that MacDonald places some distance between himself and the subject of his critique. This leads us to wonder, today, why he never wrote a more direct literary critique such as the kind that we find in *Hard Times* or *North and South*. It seems that MacDonald was ever on the verge of making his voice known more publicly, but always pulled slightly back at the last moment.

Still, it may be worthwhile to examine the nature of *greed* in the fantasy novels where MacDonald may have felt more at liberty to criticise the growth of the industrial city in Britain. As mentioned above, MacDonald never depicts Manchester or other industrial cities in his novels. But he does suggest that certain 'cities' in his fiction (such as Bulika in *Lilith* and Gwyntystorm in *The Princess and Curdie*) are governed by greed and materialism. In the final

⁵² George MacDonald, *St. George and St. Michael* (London: Henry S. King, 1876; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1996); cited as *SGSM*, Chapter LIX, 'Ave! Vale! Sale!', pp. 430-1.

three paragraphs of *The Princess and Curdie*, the greed for gold causes Gwyntystorm to dig deep under its streets, which weakens its foundations. Eventually, the city collapses in a *mammon*-induced apocalypse. MacDonald writes that the ‘cries of men and the shrieks of women went up with its dust and then there was a great silence’ (*PC*, Chapter XXXV, ‘The End’, 320).

Incredibly, despite the book’s ominous finale, MacDonald appears to be content with Gwyntystorm’s demise and uses the event of its downfall to illustrate a rebirth in Nature: ‘Where the mighty rock once towered, crowded with homes and crowned with a palace, now rushes and raves a stone-obstructed rapid of the river. All around spreads a wilderness of wild deer, and the very name of Gwyntystorm has ceased from the lips of men’ (*PC*, Chapter XXXV, ‘The End’, 320). MacDonald appears to have a similar idea in mind when he concludes *St. George and St. Michael*. As an alternative to the apocalypse, MacDonald hopes for simply a better generation of humanity that will come after the nineteenth century, writing: ‘But this era too will pass, and truth come forth in forms new and more lovely still’ (*SGSM*, Chapter LIX, ‘Ave! Vale! Salve!’, 431). In contrast to the conclusion of *The Princess and Curdie*, the conclusion of *St. George and St. Michael* is optimistic and suggests that the continuity found in Nature may heal the pain inflicted by the men of the nineteenth century. MacDonald claims that the same sky, clouds, and moon have been spread across the centuries before ending with the most crucial element on earth—the heart of humanity: ‘And however the mind, or even the spirit of man may change, the heart remains the same, and an effort to read the hearts of our forefathers will help us to know the heart of our neighbour’ (*SGSM*, Chapter LIX, ‘Ave! Vale! Salve!’, 432).

Indeed, MacDonald’s conclusion in *St. George and St. Michael* is more uplifting than the conclusion in *The Princess and Curdie*, written a few years later. Wolff suggests that the conclusion in the latter book reveals MacDonald’s ever increasing state of pessimism, ‘striking

out at what he hates, and convinced that evil triumphs in the end' (176). Contrasting the novel with its prequel, *The Princess and the Goblin*, Wolff concludes that the 'joyfulness' of the first book 'has been replaced by a choking pessimistic gloom, in which, even when the forces of evil fly in disorder, it is only to regroup and triumph in the end' (178-9). According to Wolff, this conclusion provides evidence that, in his later years, 'MacDonald wrote like a man in despair, not resigned, but angry with an anger he felt to be futile' (179).

Wolff's argument may not be entirely correct, for if we compare the inherent meaning within the conclusions of *St. George and St. Michael* and *The Princess and Curdie*, we discover a clue that actually suggests spiritual optimism—not natural pessimism. What we find in MacDonald, as these comparisons have shown, is that the author maintained belief in a divine continuity in Nature which he compares to the human heart and suggests that both are manifestations of God's imagination.⁵³

Despite a few occasions where a grievance was aired, MacDonald's general opinion on Britain's industrial crisis was fairly subtle. What was more important, for him, was not the struggle against industry but the struggles against *mammon*, which he saw as a spiritually degenerative state of mind. Progress, of any kind, had potential to be corrupted by *mammon*. Yet, in the end, MacDonald always took comfort in his belief that good would triumph and Nature would restore the Earth.

⁵³ George MacDonald, 'The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture' in *Orts*, pp. 1-42, pp. 2-5.

CHAPTER TWO

The City

Introduction

The communities George MacDonald writes about most often are provincial towns, such as Rothieden and Glamerton—both of which have been reconstructed from his hometown in Huntly, Aberdeenshire; but this chapter is interested more in his representations of the city. Several characteristics of Aberdeen are represented in three Scottish novels: *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (1865), *Robert Falconer* (1868), and *Sir Gibbie* (1879). However, it only serves as a partial setting for the novels and the vast majority of MacDonald's readers would have had little knowledge, perhaps none, of Scotland's *Granite City*.⁵⁴ A black and grimy Manchester is depicted in 'A Manchester Poem' (1871), but it is not discussed in any of the novels or short stories. This is somewhat surprising since MacDonald lived there between 1853 and 1857. London was the only true metropolis in Britain during the nineteenth century and MacDonald's engagement with it, much less his representations of it, has not been explored. Though Scottish by birth, the greater part of MacDonald's adult life was spent within or around London and, in many ways, his social views were defined by the problems of the city. This chapter explores how MacDonald interpreted and represented these problems, with a special emphasis on urban poverty, in his novels.

Despite urban problems characterised by the Condition-of-England novelists in the 1840s-50s, the growth of the industrial city and the social-environmental problems it caused failed to subside. In fact, additional cities such as Manchester, Birmingham, and Liverpool grew,

⁵⁴ See David S. Robb, *God's Fiction: Symbolism and Allegory in the Works of George MacDonald*, pp. 34-6.

feeding the ever increasing ‘spirit of industry’ for which this period has become known. The metropolis of London, though not an industrial city in the same sense as industrial cities in the north of England, continued to expand in size and population, as was discussed in the preceding chapter. This expansion brought numerous societal issues to the city and its residents were faced with slum development, crime, and other problems arising from poor sanitation such as infectious disease and pollution. These issues increased the gap between the upper and lower classes, crystallising Disraeli’s portrait of Britain as a land encompassed by two nations (*Sybil, or the Two Nations*, 1845). MacDonald illustrates a few of these societal issues in his ‘London novels’, two of which, *The Vicar’s Daughter* (1872), and *Weighed and Wanting* (1882), are discussed in this chapter. Additionally, some discussion is also allotted to *Robert Falconer* (1868). Though it is a Scottish novel, it is valuable to this chapter due to its minute depiction of urban poverty and London’s East End mentality.

The central argument of this chapter is to show that despite MacDonald’s depiction of central and eastern London as a dangerous place stricken by crime and guilt, he maintained a firm belief that it also had hope. His belief rested on the motives of responsible social workers, such as Octavia Hill and her team of volunteer fellow-workers of which he and his family were a part. This chapter will draw attention to MacDonald’s humanitarianism by offering a discussion of his volunteer work with Hill and the Kyrle Society. Yet, the primary purpose of the discussion is not necessarily to introduce Hill but to highlight specific social endeavours that she enacted and MacDonald’s representation of them in his fiction. MacDonald, with the helping influence of his friends, James Greenwood and Charles Manby Smith, had already begun to develop a growing concern for the state of urban poverty; yet, it was his unique friendship with Hill that provided him with greater insight into the world of the London poor. Convinced by her passion

to bring better housing to the working classes, as well as to make art and Nature more accessible to them, MacDonald wrote novels highlighting the social problems of his day and prompted readers to become more socially conscious of their community. Inspired by Hill's ideology, it is no wonder, then, that MacDonald populates his 'London novels' with female philanthropists who enact Hill's social work. As such, MacDonald reveals that he reserved some hope for London's reformation. Knowing this helps us to understand more of MacDonald's social ideology. It is important for us to remember that MacDonald was ever trying to convince his readers of a better worldview, which lay, ultimately, in the doing of God's will.

This idea is suggested in MacDonald's letter to his friend, William Cowper-Temple, wherein he describes the type of books he prefers to compose, confirming his determination 'to make them true to the real and not the spoilt humanity'; thereafter, he asks: 'Why should I spend my labour on what one can have too much of without any labour? I will try to show what we might be, may be, must be, shall be—and something of the struggle to gain it' ('Letter to William Cowper-Temple, 13 January 1879', in Sadler, 288-9).

Divided into three parts, this chapter illustrates MacDonald's efforts to portray the existence of hope to counter and alleviate urban despair as he saw it in London. Part One presents a thorough discussion of Octavia Hill, the Kyrle Society, and MacDonald's involvement with both. This discussion not only offers a historical approach to this study, but it also suggests how MacDonald's social views were constructed. Offering a brief history of London's slum districts and the 'crises' of the 1860s and 1880s, Part Two sets the foundation further by defining and narrowing the context of urban philanthropy in London's East End. Part Three demonstrates MacDonald's perception of philanthropy in Victorian London, with particular emphasis on its slum districts. Though he sometimes discusses the negative aspects of these areas, he feels,

nevertheless, that they harbour good people who, due to their spiritual obedience in doing God's will, combat urban despair by working for the well-being of the poor. This concept is found in some of his earliest works, especially with the character Robert Falconer, who is not only the quintessential hero-character in MacDonald's fiction, but is also his literary portrait of Christ.

Part One

MacDonald, Octavia Hill, and the Kyrle Society

Octavia Hill

In 1859 MacDonald began lecturing on poetry at the Working Men's College in London. During one of his lectures that year he met the young Octavia Hill and, soon after, the two formed a life-long friendship.⁵⁵ Today, Hill is remembered largely for her courageous social efforts in providing housing to the poor as well as developing several political campaigns which addressed environmental preservation, one of which resulted in the creation of the National Trust. She is, rightfully, the crucial figure that should be discussed to understand MacDonald's social concerns. Furthermore, it may be argued that in her, MacDonald found the muse who represented his idea of true Christian ministering. Of those Victorians among MacDonald's friends who fought for the common welfare of the underprivileged, Hill stands, perhaps, foremost. Like MacDonald, Hill was a deeply religious person and used her faith-based principles to introduce reform in the areas of housing and environmentalism. Greville refers to his father's close friendship and working relationship with Hill in both *George MacDonald and*

⁵⁵ See *GMDW*, p. 368, n. 1.

His Wife and Reminiscences of a Specialist.⁵⁶ Likewise, Hill's published letters provide ample points of evidence pertaining to how crucially MacDonald and his family served her during her times of personal difficulties as well as offer multiple testimonials regarding their volunteer work together.⁵⁷ Lastly, as this chapter argues, her ideas and actions may have inspired MacDonald, ever strengthening his idea that man must become a fellow-worker with God, which he then transcribed into the pages of his novels.

Octavia Hill's parents introduced her to Christian Socialist principles such as serving society 'not through introspection but through action'.⁵⁸ Though there were various branches, the Christian Socialists were united under F.D. Maurice's belief that a Christian society should be one that frees its subjects from bondage, whether the bondage comes from the dogmatism of religion or the lack of education.⁵⁹ Thus, the Working Men's College was formed in 1854 under his direction with the premise that working men should be educated, 'that no education could be good for them which did not recognise them as English citizens, and did not aim directly at the object of qualifying them to perform their duties as English citizens' (F.D. Maurice, vii). Furthermore, Maurice proposes: 'if we would benefit them as a class, we must first of all treat them as men whose highest interests must be the same with those of the millionaire or the noble' (vii). Such a view of society formed the young Hill's belief that all men were in need of common comforts and, most importantly, compassion.

⁵⁶ *GMDW*, pp. 380-3; *Rems*, pp. 33-4 and 85-95.

⁵⁷ *Life of Octavia Hill as Told in Her Letters*, ed. by C. Edmund Maurice (London: MacMillan, 1913) and *Octavia Hill: Early Ideals*, ed. by Emily S. Maurice (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928).

⁵⁸ Nancy Boyd, *Josephine Butler, Octavia Hill, Florence Nightingale: Three Victorian Women Who Changed Their World* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 98. Octavia's mother held a management position within Maurice's Ladies' Co-operative Guild at Russell Place in Fitzroy Square.

⁵⁹ F.D. Maurice, *The Workman and the Franchise: Chapters from English History on the Representation and Education of the People* (London: Alexander Strahan, 1866; reprinted by New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1970), pp. 13-5.

As a teenager, Hill began to work for the Christian Socialists in London where she was placed in charge of a toy-making venture. During this time, her humanitarian concerns and leadership skills began to surface. These concerns began with the observation of her co-workers' families, many of which belonged in the poor working class and she felt particularly concerned for the education of their children. Thus, she began instructing the young ones in practical skills. Encouraged by her leadership qualities, Maurice invited Hill to take part in his Guild where she attended lectures given by the Christian Socialist leaders. Eventually, Maurice formed the Working Women's College in 1856 and offered Hill the position of a secretary, bringing her into greater contact with other social workers.

At this point, Maurice's Christian Socialism had gained sufficient momentum. E. Moberly Bell writes that the:

social side of the Gospel is not nowadays likely to be ignored, it seems to-day almost impossible to believe that when the Christian Socialists preached it, they were met with furious abuse and were accused of stirring up revolution, because they maintained that there were rights inherent in humanity and that these must be conceded even to those dangerous people, the Lower Classes.⁶⁰

Stephen Prickett places heavy emphasis upon Maurice's universal society, stating that in contrast with other key politico-religious sects of the day, his Christian Socialism achieved an integration such that the 'concern for poverty and its accompanying educational deprivation was not an extension of the old idea of "charity", but a principle of social theology', and, furthermore, adds that 'A universal spiritual society ultimately implied a redistribution of wealth'.⁶¹ In 1856, Hill wrote a response to an enquirer who had asked for information about the Christian Socialists. Her response demonstrates Maurice's idea of universal brotherhood:

The Society was composed of people of all religions, and differing in politics—Chartists, Conservatives, Whigs, Radicals. They called themselves Christian Socialists because,

⁶⁰ E. Moberly Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography* (London: Constable, 1942), pp. 17-8.

⁶¹ Stephen Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976), p. 142.

they said, that the meeting point for all sorts of Socialists was the belief that fellow-work was stronger than isolation, union than division, and generosity than selfishness. (Emily S. Maurice, 26)

And so it was early in Hill's life that her attitudes were swayed to fall in the direction of working for the common good of society. Undoubtedly, Hill did not see herself as promoting a political agenda; instead, she viewed her devotion to the welfare of humanity as a devotion to God. According to Nancy Boyd: 'The key to [Hill's] consistencies, and the explanation of her inconsistencies can only be found by analysing her theology and following each strand—her views of God, Providence, good and evil, Christian sociology—to its place in her vocation' (122). Thus, Hill's loyalty to Maurice, along with her Christian Socialist upbringing, provides us with an understanding of her intellectual spirituality; and, like MacDonald, the key to comprehending Hill is to assert the fact that she was governed by what she felt was the will of God.

Another significant person in Hill's life was John Ruskin, whose works she avidly read. Having absorbed the ideas presented in the first two volumes of *Modern Painters* (1843-60), Hill was able to meet their author when he visited the Co-operative Guild in the mid-1850s. Ruskin was impressed with her keen appreciation of art and began instructing her in drawing techniques, even commissioning her to work on copies of Dürer and Turner for his subsequent volumes of *Modern Painters*. Yet, Hill's high esteem for Ruskin, as well as for art and truth in beauty, could not outweigh her desire to aid the poor. Writing to her friend, Hill mentions a discussion with Ruskin on human pathos and the lack of its current expression in art. Ruskin jokingly tells Hill: 'If you devote yourself to human expression, I know how it will be, you will watch it more and more, and there will be an end of art for you. You will say "Hang drawing!! I must go on to help people"' ('Letter to Mary Harris, 29 January 1858', in Emily S. Maurice, 129-31). Yet, so

passionate were Hill's ideas that even Ruskin felt he must do something more for the people and eventually came to her aid by financing the bulk of her future housing schemes.

And so it was in 1864 that Hill began to harbour thoughts of becoming a landlord for the sake of the London poor. The inspiration for such an endeavour may have originated from when she was employed with the toy-making venture at the Working Women's College. Many of the children whom she instructed belonged to families that resided in damp, dilapidated buildings. In March of the same year, Ruskin's father died, leaving him a substantial inheritance and since Ruskin felt that he could not be rich and at the same time remain a socialist, he sought means of putting the money to good use.⁶² Ruskin quickly turned to the advice of Hill and, as a means of improving society, embarked upon a rather risky endeavour of financing three houses for her to manage at Paradise Place.⁶³ In a letter to Hill, Ruskin writes that the venture would provide 'one of the greatest pleasures yet possible to me, by enabling me to be of use in this particular manner and to these ends' ('Letter to Octavia Hill, 19 May 1864', in Bell, 74-5). The project, chronicled throughout *Homes of the London Poor* (1875), was a success. As well, it helped to solidify Hill's philosophy of self-worth which begins with the foundation of a stable home. Boyd elaborates upon this philosophy as she writes: 'As long as the poor had no access to the comforts of "home life" they could not achieve the beginnings of human dignity' (107). Just as Maurice believed that all men must be given a chance to attain dignity, Hill felt that by helping the poor to raise their domestic standards, they would thus aspire to a better state of living.

After a few years of hard work, however, Hill began to suffer from exhaustion and by 1867, Ruskin appealed to MacDonald to allow her to join their summer excursion to Bude (a

⁶² Raeper offers the figure as £120,000 with an additional £10,000 in 'property and pictures' (*George MacDonald*, p. 223).

⁶³ Octavia Hill, *Homes of the London Poor* (London: Macmillan, 1875; reprinted with Andrew Mearns's *The Bitter Cry of the Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* (London: Frank Cass, 1970), pp. 11-2 and 18.

northern coastal village in Devon). During her stay with the MacDonald family, she observed Greville's difficulty in trying to learn Latin. Thus, Hill, who 'could never resist the call of those in need, and a child who hated to learn seemed to her in sore need of help', interceded on Greville's behalf and became his tutor for the summer (Bell, 69). Greville informs us that 'every morning she took that dreamy, indolent boy across the breakwater to the top of the Chapel-rock, and made him in love, if not with Æneas and Dido, at least with the Latin Grammar, as well as— incidentally but quite permanently—with herself' (*GMDW*, 368-9). That Greville was forever enamoured with Hill is only too evident from the praise he offers her in his *George MacDonald and His Wife*. Furthermore, in another biographical work, he alludes to her powerful influence and even suggests: 'If Octavia Hill had lived in the Middle Ages, she would have been sainted, more surely than any I have known; and her statue enshrined in many a cathedral' (*Rems*, 87). He later goes on to write, in a rather lengthy defence, how Hill actually fulfilled the set canonical requirements for her sainthood. Afterwards, Hill joined the MacDonalds in other family excursions to Scotland and Italy.⁶⁴

Greville was not the only child in MacDonald's household to be enamoured with Hill. The joint understanding of the need for social reform was felt so strongly amongst the women in the MacDonald household that they took an active part in Hill's charitable efforts. Not only did the family work together to open their Hammersmith home on a regular basis to entertain her tenants, along with anyone else that Hill was successful in persuading to come, but they also performed in the houses which Hill managed. In 1873, Hill offered MacDonald's eldest child, Lilia Scott, the position as 'Master of the Revels', which placed her in charge of supervising performances and other special events (Hein, *George MacDonald—Victorian Mythmaker*, 375).

⁶⁴ See *GMDW*, p. 407, Raeper, *George MacDonald*, p. 342, and Bell, p. 166.

Lilia impressed her father with her leadership skills and her heightened level of human sympathy which, perhaps, coincided with that of Hill's.

It was also during this time that the Kyrle Society (discussed at length below) was formed and that Hill obtained Barrett's Court, a dilapidated housing complex, which was eventually rebuilt and renamed St Christopher's Place.⁶⁵ After establishing the new place, Hill began to use it to provide a variety of 'wholesome entertainments' for her tenants. In a letter to her friend, Hill points out that the MacDonald family was the first to provide these entertainments, writing: 'Last night the season opened with a capital play by the MacDonalds, the room was crowded to overflowing' ('Letter to Mary Harris, 1 November 1874', in Bell, 135). William Raeper writes that at Barrett's Court, 'Grace would play Beethoven on her piano, and Greville would scratch on his violin. Their speciality was Carols at Christmas time, punctuated by MacDonald's dramatic renderings of specially composed nativity verses' (*George MacDonald*, 265).⁶⁶ In his *Reminiscences of a Specialist*, Greville MacDonald also writes of these social gatherings and remarks that Grace's fine interpretations of Beethoven, Chopin and Schumann were an especial draw for the attendees (34). Not only did these gatherings become a significant outlet for MacDonald's ministry, but they also provided ample opportunities for him to work alongside Hill and to observe her ideals of personal and effective social reform.

Besides volunteering to work with the Musical Branch of the Kyrle Society at St Christopher's Place, MacDonald received Hill's tenants on multiple occasions by opening his home and garden, providing them with refreshments and entertainments (plays, mostly, produced by the MacDonald family with the help of their friends). He was able to accomplish this by

⁶⁵ Bell points out that the buildings at Barrett's Court were initially bought by Lady Ducie and Miss Sterling and then handed over to Hill (pp. 116-7).

⁶⁶ It may interest some readers to know that MacDonald's daughter, Grace, named her first child, Octavia Grace, after Octavia Hill. Unfortunately, Grace died two years later in 1884 and was followed by her daughter in 1891.

converting his family's coachhouse into a working theatre. Greville records that during the first of these parties, Ruskin and Hill led the 'Sir Roger de Coverley' (*GMDW*, 381). The fact that MacDonald facilitated his home as a significant place to serve London's poor also shows that he saw himself as one of Hill's active volunteers and offered his aptly-named house, 'the Retreat', to be a *retreat* for impoverished families. MacDonald attests to these occurrences and incorporates them as colourful parts of his novels' plots in *Guild Court* (1868), *The Vicar's Daughter* (1872) and *Weighed and Wanting* (1882).

More important to this study is that MacDonald's social ideals were sometimes overlapped by Hill's. First, Hill felt that charitable organisations had failed to effectively meet the needs of the poor. Monetary handouts and almsgiving she saw as the root of the problem. Therefore, in 1869, Hill published a paper entitled 'The Importance of Aiding the Poor without Almsgiving', where she challenged the charity system and suggested that alternatives be given to encourage the poor to work for themselves and not resort to beggary.

Charity, often depicted negatively in MacDonald's fiction, appears to have allowed the rich to give a small token, look the other way and avoid feeling guilty; likewise, it also appears to have been a rather condescending device used by the church to evangelise the poor. To counter such an obstacle, MacDonald used his literature to suggest that something far deeper than monetary gifts attached to religious tracts were needed to remind the poor that they are people of spiritual worth and that they share a common duty to serve humanity for its own good. MacDonald is emphasising the spiritual progression that comes with the acknowledgement and fulfilment of one's duty through work.

Second, both MacDonald and Hill felt strongly that the spiritual needs of humanity took priority over its physical needs. This is a crucial point, especially for MacDonald, who felt that

the spiritual and physical worlds were interrelated; however, these spiritual needs could not be met with the face of a dogmatic religion. Though both persons were devoutly religious, both believed that religion was a personal issue and that to flaunt their religious attitudes and theories as a means of shaming the poor would be no different from taking on the cloak of the Pharisee. To avoid his 'hero' figures being seen as such, MacDonald treads carefully. Characters such as Robert Falconer in *Robert Falconer* and Marion Clare in *The Vicar's Daughter* are presented as Christ-like emblems of MacDonald's idealised social workers; yet, they are not quite religious figures. An interesting example belongs to the title character of *Paul Faber, Surgeon*, who expels his assistant from his practice after he discovers the assistant vivisectioning a dog. Paul Faber is interesting because, unlike the rest of MacDonald's heroes and heroines, he is an atheist; yet, despite his views on religion, he is morally opposed to vivisection and strives to make his community a better place for society.⁶⁷

Lastly, MacDonald learned from Hill that human touch played a significant part in helping those in need; he made this particular endeavour a core attribute in the way he constructed his characters. His ideal Christian heroes always understood that the honest needs of humanity were met by personal touch. Throughout the whole of MacDonald's literature, this intimate theme is present. This is, likewise, an essential element in MacDonald's spirituality. In his *Miracles of Our Lord*, MacDonald persistently reflects on the point that Jesus healed by *touching*. Had his heroes and heroines not touched those whom they sought to serve, they could not have rightfully fulfilled MacDonald's view of Christ as Hero. Inspired by Hill's manner of locating a way to interact with the poorer classes and showing them human compassion, MacDonald prompts his readers to do likewise. For both Hill and MacDonald, this was what they believed to be true social reform.

⁶⁷ A much fuller discussion of these characters is given in this and the fourth chapter.

The Kyrle Society

Not only was Hill an active participant in housing reform in London, she was also an active environmentalist and is remembered today as one of the founders of the National Trust. Nevertheless, Hill was not alone when it came to political environmentalism in the nineteenth century. Major improvements were made across Britain to preserve natural beauty such as the building of parks and the expansion of green spaces in the cities; yet, access to Nature was still very much limited for the poor and this was seen as a problem by both Hill and MacDonald.

Thus, in 1875, Hill and her sister, Miranda, formed an organisation of artists and writers alike to bring beauty to the communities of the poor. The original title for the organisation was ‘The Society for the Diffusion of Beauty’. However, the ‘Kyrle Society’ was adopted instead. The society’s namesake was John Kyrle (1637-1724), an early philanthropist who planted trees and constructed a public park in Ross-on-Wye.⁶⁸ Consisting of various branches (Decorative, Musical, Open Spaces, and Literature Distribution), the Kyrle Society attempted to ‘diffuse’ beauty to the poor and MacDonald played an active role in its developmental stages. Furthermore, he wrote, directed, and volunteered his family in performing various dramas and music recitals with the Musical Branch (Boyd, 114). William Morris was an avid supporter of the Kyrle Society and he, along with Walter Crane, Lord Leighton, G.F. Watts, Edward Burne-Jones, and other artists, worked through the Decorative Branch by painting murals in hospitals and slogans with moral-driven mottoes in various parts of London.

⁶⁸ For a thorough history of the society, see Anne Hoole Anderson, ‘Bringing Beauty Home to the People: The Kyrle Society, 1877-1917’ in *Octavia Hill’s Letters to Fellow-Workers, 1872-1911: Together with an Account of the Walmer Street Industrial Experiment*, ed. by Robert Whelan (London: Kyrle Books, 2005), pp. 703-33; as well, see Anne Anderson and Elizabeth Darling, ‘The Hill Sisters: Cultural Philanthropy and the Embellishment of Lives in Late-Nineteenth-Century England’ in *Women and the Making of Built Space in England, 1870-1950*, ed. by Elizabeth Darling and Lesley Whitworth (Aldershot: Ashgate: 2007), pp. 33-48, pp. 44-7.

Although Hill's affinity for beauty was initially inspired by Ruskin's mentoring and friendship, it may be argued that it could have been enhanced by MacDonald. In one brief letter, Hill demonstrates her awe of MacDonald's perception of beauty, claiming that he told her:

when we have seen the perfectly beautiful, if we have the right kind of eyes, it helps us to see all that is lovely in less beautiful things—so life in a lovely country develops the power of perceiving beauty; once get an eye of the right kind, and you are enabled to see beauty in every place. ('Letter to Mary Harris, 21 May 1865', in Emily S. Maurice, 82)

Shortly afterwards, Hill, in her *Homes of the London Poor*, established this theory as a prominent part of her social strategy. She writes:

I have tried, as far as opportunity has permitted, to develop the love of beauty among my tenants. The poor of London need joy and beauty in their lives. There is no more true and eternal law to be recognised about them than that which Mr. Dickens shows in 'Hard Times'—the fact that every man has an imagination which needs development and satisfaction. (29-30)

Indeed, it was not only MacDonald's friendship with Hill that helped to form a perfect complement to the 'love of beauty' which she gained from Ruskin's teachings, but it was also MacDonald's romanticised ideology and unique theology which helped her to focus on the idea that God is reflected in beauty.

In an effort to represent this idea to her tenants, the Decorative Branch beautified various courts and squares throughout London and placed inscriptions, based upon positive sayings from literature and the Bible, on the walls of her buildings. In a letter addressed to her fellow-workers, Hill details the importance of the inscriptions as a context of divine beauty ('A Special Extra Letter to Fellow-Workers about a Proposed Inscription on Freshwater Place, 5 October 1873' in C. Edmund Maurice, 292-5). The proposed inscription in this case was 'Every house is builded by some man; but He that built all things is God'. She calls for her fellow-workers to help procure the rather expensive letters adding: 'If any of you will give a letter, you may like to feel that you have helped to write a sentence that will speak when you are far away, and after you are

dead' ('A Special Extra Letter to Fellow-Workers about a Proposed Inscription on Freshwater Place, 5 October 1873', in C. Edmund Maurice, 294). Hill received ample support from her volunteers and in a following letter, written a few weeks later, she reports that De Morgan created the colourful tiles ('Letter to Mr Cockerell, 26 October 1873' in C. Edmund Maurice, 295-7). She then concludes with a listing of the fellow-workers who contributed to each letter of the inscription. The letter shows that Ruskin contributed to the letter 'H' and the MacDonalds to the letter 'E' to form the word 'He'.

Yet, the most costly branch of the Kyrle Society was the Open Spaces Branch. The funds needed to purchase green spaces for preservation were totally dependent upon donations, but the need to make Nature accessible to the poor was felt deeply by both Hill and MacDonald.

In her collection of essays, *Our Common Land* (1877), Hill attacks a proposed bill to enclose open land and presents a vision of how ample green space, freely provided for the common welfare, is needed for the moral betterment of the poor.⁶⁹ Feeling that Nature always provides a personal escape from the harsh nature of the city, Hill believed that it could administer the same healing properties for her tenants. According to Gillian Darley:

Octavia would never have considered herself beaten by the problems of the city [...] but she personally retreated to the countryside at any opportunity, and in the later years of her life spent a considerable amount of time in a cottage near Edenbridge. She was at one with romantics [...] in her imagery of the countryside even if, in her scheme of things, open country was to be like a glorious back garden to city life and crowded conditions. (172)

This is represented in Hill's own words in *Our Common Land* when she claims:

To us the Common or forest looks indeed crowded with people, but to them [the poor] the feeling is one of sufficient space, free air, green grass, and colour, with a life without which they may think the place dull. Every atom of open space you have left to these people is needed; take care you lose none of it; it is becoming yearly of more vital importance to save or increase it. (4-5)

⁶⁹ Octavia Hill, *Our Common Land and Other Short Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1877).

Distancing herself (i.e. 'us') from 'them', Hill acknowledges that there is a specific social division between the Victorian middle-class and the working poor. Additionally, Hill argues that the poor seem to appreciate Nature (having thus a greater need for it) more than the middle-classes.

Furthermore, it must be stressed that Hill's approach to environmental reform was, for her, an act of religious duty. Writing to her sister, Hill claims:

The fact is, if one sits down to make a plan, it is often foolish and impracticable; but the plans life reveals to us, which are unfolded to us, and which we are hardly conscious of,—these, I think, are usually God's plans, and He helps us to carry them out. If this is not what He means me to do, may He, for He alone can, help me to give it up; but if, as now I think, He has been preparing me by multitudes of things, childhood in the country, girlhood in town, hard work, most precious and direct teaching of drawing, sympathy with people round, affection for and gratitude to Ruskin, and an ever deepening admiration for him, and knowledge of his plans,—if, I say, God has been preparing me by this, and much more, first to love Nature and Art, second, to care that all should love Nature and Art, and third to see how to help them to do so; will He not too give me humility to take the place He ordains for me in this great work, tho' it be the lowest of all,—faith to believe I can help, and oh such energy and earnestness? ('Letter to Miranda Hill, 10 October 1859', in C. Edmund Maurice, 160-1)

Hill clearly agrees with MacDonald's opinion that humanitarian service to others is the fulfilment of God's will and that one's position in society is immaterial in comparison with the honour of being a fellow-worker with God. Like MacDonald's ideal Christian heroes, Octavia's life in the country helped shape and inspire her to carry out the work God intended her to do upon her relocation to the city.

Likewise, MacDonald was well aware of the poor man's need to encounter Nature, as well as the ways that Nature itself serves man as a healing, spiritual element. These concerns formed the foundation of the Kyrle Society's mission to *bring* art and nature within reach of the poor. Sharing Hill's belief that Nature is a beneficial force for the poor, MacDonald aided her and the Kyrle Society by bringing the tenants of St Christopher's Place into contact with Nature. Regular outings were scheduled for the tenants to visit local museums and parks in and around

London. However, financing such excursions into the countryside surrounding London was a taxing and costly endeavour. Because of this, the Kyrle Society's core mission sought to bring Nature and beauty to the city by locating and preserving green spaces that were within reach of the urban population.

One such project which the Open Spaces Branch carried out was the acquisition of Hilly Fields, Deptford in 1892. The total sum for the land was in the amount of £42,000. Hill sent out letters to her fellow-workers and campaigned heavily to reach her goal for securing the land. According to Hill's 'Donation Account' in her 1892 'Letter to Fellow-Workers', MacDonald contributed £55 to the preservation of Hilly Fields.⁷⁰ In her 1893 letter, Hill announced that the scheme was successful. Though the MacDonalds struggled incessantly with financial problems, their donation (which the MacDonald household would have considered a costly gift) provides sufficient evidence of their sincere regard for Hill's environmental endeavours.

MacDonald was already convinced that Nature was spiritually important and began to explore its relationship to man and society in his poetry. In two poems, 'The Sheep and the Goat' (1863) and 'A Manchester Poem' (1871), MacDonald illustrates two critical points that reflect this relationship. In 'The Sheep and the Goat', MacDonald anticipates the endeavours of the Open Spaces Branch of the Kyrle Society by depicting Regent's Park as not only a refreshing source of life in the midst of a labyrinth of streets which 'Repel all country sights' but also as a place offering spiritual renewal.⁷¹ The subject of the poem is a tired and thirsty sheep, near the point of death, which is given water by a ragged child, one of 'The little human goats' who, seeking refuge from the city, roams the park for natural refreshment. Praising the child's thoughtful attention to the poor creature, MacDonald writes:

⁷⁰ *Octavia Hill's Letters to Fellow-Workers, 1872-1911: Together with an Account of the Walmer Street Experiment*, ed. by Robert Whelan (London: Kyrle Books, 2005), p. 328.

⁷¹ George MacDonald, 'The Sheep and the Goat' in *PW1*, pp. 416-7, p. 416, line 2.

O little goat, born, bred in ill,
 Unwashed, half-fed, unshorn,
 Thou to the sheep from breezy hill
 Wast bishop, pastor, what you will,
 In London dry and lorn! (*PWI*, 'The Sheep and the Goat', 417, lines 41-5)

Though MacDonald's depiction of London is often negative, hope is still offered within various corners and parks where man and Nature may come together. Several years later, Hill and the Open Spaces Branch of the Kyrle Society took active steps in securing more green spaces within London and its surrounding communities. Like MacDonald, they believed that parks and green spaces brought both physical and spiritual refreshment to the city.

In 'A Manchester Poem', MacDonald turns his attention to another city, one that he represents as having been scarred by the ills of industrialism. The poem begins with MacDonald's typically negative view of industrialism:

Slave engines utter again their ugly growl,
 And soon the iron bands and blocks of stone
 That prison them to their task, will strain and quiver
 Until the city tremble. The clamour of bells,
 Importunate, keeps calling pale-faced forms
 To gather and feed those Samsons' groaning strength
 With labour [...]. (*PWI*, 'A Manchester Poem', 422, lines 7-13)

Turning from the city, MacDonald employs similar imagery to describe the shabby housing conditions of the poor where home is portrayed as 'a dreary place!' consisting of:

Unfinished walls,
 Earth-heaps, and broken bricks, and muddy pools
 Lie round it like a rampart against the spring,
 The summer, and all sieges of the year. (*PWI*, 'A Manchester Poem', 423, lines 37-40)

The single source of hope displayed within their shabby dwellings is a Bible. Though the scene is evocative of Burns's 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' (1785), with the hard-working but poverty-stricken family grouped together around a meek fireplace and a Bible, MacDonald is not content with the representation. Even though he believed that true life and all hope can only be found in Christ, he still turns to Nature. Thus, the impoverished family depicted in this poem is unable to

obtain spiritual comfort while they remain in this setting. They must go to Nature for spiritual comfort, rather than to the Bible alone. However, Manchester does not offer such a refreshing oasis as that which Regent's Park offers London. Here, MacDonald seems to be suggesting that poor and destitute families must forsake the city and find spiritual refuge in the surrounding countryside. Once there, they are free from their *factory prisons* and can experience life as God had intended they should. MacDonald states that here, in the midst of Nature:

the humble man of heart
Will revel in the grass beneath his foot,
And from the lea lift his glad eye to heaven,
God's palette, where his careless painter-hand
Sweeps comet-clouds that net the gazing soul;
Streaks endless stairs, and blots half-sculptured blocks;
Curves filmy pallors; heaps huge mountain-crag;
Nor touches where it leaves not beauty's mark. (*PWI*, 'A Manchester Poem', 425, lines 108-15)

Nature awakens a sense of hope within the poor family and ignites their imaginations to ponder the origin of all things, leading them to God. MacDonald continues:

Then wakes an unknown want, which asks and looks
As for some thing forgot – loved long ago,
But on the hither verge of childhood dropt:
'Tis but home-sickness roused in the soul by Spring!
Fresh birth and eager growth, reviving life,
Which *is* because it *would be* [...]. (*PWI*, 'A Manchester Poem', 425, lines 120-5)

As they continue upon their excursion, they find a snowdrop (always used by MacDonald as a symbol to represent hope), gently uproot it and take it home:

Bearing all heaven into a common house,
It brings in with it field and sky and air. (*PWI*, 'A Manchester Poem', 427, lines 190-1)

MacDonald's point here is explicitly stated. He offers a single snowdrop to replace the Bible in the family's house, emphasising the importance of Nature.

Articles from Nature, such as flowers, typically replace religious dogma and biblical tracts in MacDonald's fiction. Yet, as the two poems above illustrate, MacDonald felt that

Nature should be made accessible to the poor. Examples such as these suggest that he was already in tune with what would become the Kyrle Society's environmental mission, believing that closeness to Nature leads to closeness with God.

In addition to environmental preservation, members of the Kyrle Society opened their personal homes and gardens, offering music recitals and dances for those who resided in poorer communities, thus bridging a gap across the social divide. MacDonald supported this endeavour by opening his Hammersmith home (the 'Retreat') for entertainments. As well, and perhaps more importantly, MacDonald believed in the good that these moral-enhancing entertainments had for the poor, as can be attested with his novels, *Guild Court* and *Weighed and Wanting*. These entertainments sought to deliver an appreciation of art and beauty to the poor, which was the primary principle of the Kyrle Society.

In fact, MacDonald seemed to have eagerly drawn on his family's newfound talents by writing and performing various adaptations of Shakespeare, along with several original conceptions that were co-written with his wife, Louisa. Greville claims that his family performed an adaptation of Dickens's *The Haunted Man* (1848) and Zola's *L'Assommoir* (1877) (GMDW, 380-1).⁷² Yet the most famous and frequently performed production was *The Pilgrim's Progress* which the family performed free of charge for their friends and for Hill's tenants.⁷³ After the family's relocation to Italy, Louisa proposed that they begin performing *The Pilgrim's Progress* for audiences that would be willing to pay. Although this idea did not appeal to MacDonald, the family was, nevertheless, in financial trouble and the performances were made a great success by

⁷² Louisa published their adaptation of *The Haunted Man* in her *Chamber Dramas for Children* (1870). Unfortunately, after a long and unsuccessful search on my part to locate MacDonald's adaptation of Zola's novel, it must be told that the manuscript is lost.

⁷³ For a thorough history and discussion of *The Pilgrim's Progress* productions, see Rachel Johnson's 'The MacDonald Family and *Pilgrim's Progress*', *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, 8 (1989), pp. 1-2 and 'Pilgrims: The MacDonalds and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*', *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, 21 (2002), pp. 15-23.

audiences who preferred to support the family with paid admissions. During one of these occasions in 1880, MacDonald's daughter, Grace, who was expected to perform the part of Piety, became severely ill. Hill stepped forward and learned Grace's part (which was eight pages long) in a single night.⁷⁴

Wolff, whilst analysing the magic lantern performance of *The Pilgrim's Progress* given by a drunken clergyman in *Weighed and Wanting*, suggests that MacDonald perceived himself as the clergyman and thus did not like the family theatricals. Wolff claims that 'the novel's preoccupation with entertainment as an important, perhaps the pre-eminent, social service surely reflects his effort to answer the critics of the family theatrical enterprise' (303-4). Wolff's critique also mirrors his earlier suggestion that MacDonald 'disliked the enterprise, but he felt he must humble his pride and allow his wife to do the work that God has given her to do' (111). However, this hardly seems to have been true. Knowing that the theatricals provided a bridge between the poor and those who were working earnestly for their good, MacDonald must have realised that, as his novels sought to target social awareness, so did the theatrical collaborations with the Kyrle Society help to directly aid the well-being of poorer communities.

Soon after its formation, domestic branches of the Kyrle Society spread to Liverpool in 1877, Birmingham in 1880, and other cities across England (Anderson, 705). It was not until later that the society was established in Scotland, having reached Glasgow in 1882 and Edinburgh in 1885. Patrick Geddes, who brought the Arts and Crafts Movement to Scotland in the mid-1880s, was primarily responsible for its growth in Scotland.⁷⁵ Eventually, the Open Spaces Branch of the Kyrle Society inspired the formation of the National Trust in 1894. Yet, as the Hill sisters grew older and began to transfer their energies to other projects, the Kyrle Society

⁷⁴ See 'Mrs Hill to Mrs Edmund Maurice, 4 September 1880' in C. Edmund Maurice, pp. 438-9, Bell, pp. 168-9, and Boyd, p. 114.

⁷⁵ See Duncan Macmillan's *Scottish Art: 1460-1990* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1990), p. 275.

became less active and it was finally dissolved. Other than conducting public lectures and staging performances of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, MacDonald appears to have had no involvement with the Society after his relocation to Italy. Nevertheless, MacDonald's ideals regarding the need to bring the poor into contact with Nature remained a significant point of interest throughout the remainder of his writings.

Part Two

Slums and Urban Philanthropy in London, 1860s-1880s

MacDonald's treatment of London's East End echoes Dickens's. The region is depicted as noticeably dark, filled with dangerous alleyways and dilapidated buildings housing criminal minds. Additionally, London seems to have an ability to contain and hide guilty characters. This is a common theme found at the dawn of the English novel in works such as Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722), Cleland's *Fanny Hill* (1748), and Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749). It is London, after all, where Wickham is best able to hide Lydia and himself in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). Sir Felix Carbury, the son of a wealthy family, attempts to live two separate lives by donning a lower-class disguise and roaming the London slums in Anthony Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* (1875). Ultimately, his agenda is to conceal from his family his lover, Ruby Ruggles, a poor farm girl who has fled from her grandfather to a London boarding house. By the latter-part of the nineteenth century, London's capacity for hiding guilt is a significant feature found in Victorian Gothic literature: Edward Hyde *hides* in Soho and Dracula scatters and hides across London his containers of earth taken from his Transylvanian castle. Additionally, in the

fourth chapter of *Dracula* (1897), the Count instructs Jonathan Harker to tutor him in English customs and dialect so that he might not be mistaken for a foreigner: in other words, so that he might elaborately conceal himself by blending within London society.

This same aspect of the metropolis is found in MacDonald's first non-fantasy novel, *David Elginbrod* (1863), for it is in London where the villainous Count Funkelstein disappears. This theme is intensified a few years later in *Robert Falconer* (1868), wherein Robert's wayward father, Andrew, has successfully hidden for many years within London's East End. His son's only chance of finding him is by forming an intimate acquaintance with London's most notorious slum districts (such as Bethnal Green, St Giles, and the Seven Dials) through exploration and by interacting with their people to the point of trust and familiarity. Likewise, Tom Worboise, the protagonist in *Guild Court* (1868), flees to the East End docks after stealing money from his workplace. In order to hide unnoticed, he exchanges his fine clothes for shabby ones.⁷⁶ Interestingly, London's manner of concealing people is exactly that to which the young girl, Mattie, clings (in the same novel). Having never before left the overcrowded inner city of London, Mattie's first visit to the countryside is clearly a bad experience. Feeling naked, Mattie is threatened by the vast, open land and cowers from the towering sky above her. She wishes to return to the city, believing that it will hide her from the world and, more importantly, from the view of God whose gaze she fears. Mattie cries out:

if God is up there [referring to the open sky], I shall be frightened at him [...]. It is so dreadful! I used to think that God could see me when I was in London. But how he is to see me in this great place, with so many things about, cocks and larks, and all, I can't think. I'm so little! I'm hardly worth taking care of.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ MacDonald may have been thinking of Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854). Both novels depict a young character named Tom who, despite their upbringing, fall into the wrong sort of crowd, develop a habit for gambling, and consequently, rob their employers. Furthermore, as the Tom of *Hard Times* tries to conceal himself by working as a 'blackface' at a circus, so does the Tom of *Guild Court* try to disguise himself as a vagrant at the East End docks.

⁷⁷ George MacDonald, *Guild Court: A London Story* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1868; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1999); cited as GC, Chapter XXVIII, 'Mattie in the Country', p. 200.

MacDonald appears to be illustrating the feelings of fear and guilt that Adam and Eve portray in Book IX of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). However, Mattie's London is hardly an Eden of paradise and splendour.⁷⁸

Yet, this is not the complete picture, for MacDonald also represents the East side of London as a place of positive opportunities and growth. In *Robert Falconer* for instance, while searching for his father in the East End, Robert discovers that there is other work to be done, such as caring for the poor and teaching them self-worth. Likewise, in *Guild Court*, Tom's efforts to hide in the East End docks are eventually foiled by the poor residents near Guild Court who help him by restoring his place in society. Clearly, then, MacDonald's London is a dichotomous city—showing attributes of both good and evil.

When we peer deeper into the 'London novels', we discover a recurring social ideal: salvation, it seems, lies in the hands of a peculiar type of urban philanthropist who works for both the physical and spiritual good of society. Starting with *Robert Falconer*, the central theme in these novels is urban philanthropy, which coincided with the surge of national attention drawn towards London's East End by the middle of the century, encouraged, no doubt, by the journalism of Henry Mayhew and James Greenwood as well as the fiction of Charles Dickens.

Indeed, from the 1860s onwards, the rising state of urban poverty and the ever widening divide separating the rich from the poor captured not only MacDonald's attention, but the attention of the British nation. Hundreds of religious groups targeted slum districts throughout the East End of London. Initially, their work dealt with bringing a sense of spiritual revival to the poor, the majority of whom were classified as *unchurched*. The most famous of these organisations was The Christian Mission, founded in 1865 by William and Catherine Booth; the Mission's name was eventually changed to The Salvation Army in 1879.

⁷⁸ We will return to a more in-depth discussion of Mattie's story in Part Three of Chapter Three.

Not all humanitarian societies were founded or commissioned by religious groups. In 1869, Octavia Hill and Helen Bosanquet established the Charity Organisation Society, which introduced a unique but strict policy: separating the *deserving* poor from the *undeserving*.⁷⁹ We find this same type of philanthropic principle described in *Sir Gibbie* (1879), where housing is provided for homeless women on the condition that they make an active attempt to reclaim control of their lives by relinquishing their addiction to alcohol. William Booth was uncomfortable with this particular policy enforced by the Charity Organisation Society, yet was, nevertheless, influenced by their philosophy of promoting self-help principles. In effect, he added a new policy to the Salvation Army's regime in the 1880s: *to meet both the physical and spiritual needs* of those dwelling in London's East End.⁸⁰ His new approach formed the basis of his book, *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890).

It is difficult to assess what opinions MacDonald may have had regarding the Salvation Army. Although he would have approved of meeting the physical and spiritual needs of society, he may have been uncomfortable with the Salvation Army's strict formality (use of uniforms, ranked officers, etc.). In contrast to their formal approach, it is interesting to see how Greville recounts his father's informal (and possibly gentler) approach. Reminiscing about his family's volunteer work at Hill's Paradise Place, Greville writes how they would play music and his father would read to the poor:

The basement of one house was converted into an entertainment room, and there George MacDonald would gather round him the worst of characters; or rather Octavia Hill did so in the first place.

‘Will you come and hear a friend of mine read something fine on Sunday?’ she asked them one day.

‘Parson, Miss?’

⁷⁹ See Pamela J. Walker, *Pulling the Devil's Kingdom Down: The Salvation Army in Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2001), pp. 208-9 and 239. Robert Whelan gives an adequate history of the Charity Organisation Society in *Helping the Poor: Friendly Visiting, Dole Charities and Dole Queues* (London: Civitas, 2001).

⁸⁰ See Walker, pp. 235-44 and Keating, ‘Fact and Fiction in the East End’ in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, II, p. 592.

‘No.’
 ‘White choker, Miss?’
 ‘No, he generally wears a red tie.’
 ‘Done! I’ll come!’

And hands were shaken on the bargain. So in that room in tweeds and a red tie my father would tell them stories and awaken keen and sympathetic interest; he would touch ‘the red spot.’ And when his stories were gradually understood to have originated in a man named Jesus Christ, the audience forgot any suspicion they might have had of a white choker; and many became constant attendants and helpers at such entertainments. (GMDW, 382-3)

These words are later echoed in his *Reminiscences of a Specialist*, as he writes of his family playing music and his father reading to the poor:

Too degraded for even the coarsest music-halls of that day, they enjoyed, apparently to the full, any wholesome music or recitation. So may spiritual atmosphere summon into happy recognition a dormant preference for true art—provided ‘no white choker was trying to score off’em.’ They would listen to my father’s talks for an hour fascinated by his red tie—which then had no political significance. (*Rems*, 90)

Instances such as these give the impression that MacDonald was not interested in launching a strict, spiritual campaign, but rather, sought a gentler way of treating the poor as people who simply needed kind encouragement.

The red tie that MacDonald donned during these occasions also has something to say on his approach. It could have possibly been identified with a workman’s (‘Navvies’) attire, and, thus, would have suggested an informal approach, as opposed to the formal, military uniform donned by officers of the Salvation Army or the white choker of the clergyman. It may have also been intended to represent that certain ‘red spot’ which MacDonald thought was the essential, yet mysterious, agent that gave meaning to a story. MacDonald once tried to express this idea in a letter to his wife while complaining about a few poorly translated German stories that he had been reading. He writes:

As stories they just want *the one central spot of red*—the wonderful thing which, whether in a fairy story or a word or a human being, is the life and depth—whether of truth or humor or pathos—the eye to the face of it—the thing that shows the unshowable. (Letter to Louisa MacDonald, January 1860, in Sadler, 133)

Despite the many endeavours of the Salvation Army, the Charity Organisation Society, and numerous other humanitarian groups, the condition of these districts continued to deteriorate and, by the 1880s, they were no longer seen as being composed of ‘scattered and containable pockets’, as Alan Mayne suggests, but were now regarded as ‘vast teeming wildernesses, which were perpetually spilling over and extending their boundaries’.⁸¹ Numerous books were published on the topic of this crisis. Two of the most notable were Charles Booth’s *Life and Labour of the People in London* (17 vols, 1889-1903), which included colour-coded poverty maps, and Andrew Mearns’s *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* (1883), which suggested that the problem of the slums was spiritual and grew out of the slum dwellers’ lack of morality.

In conjunction with this crisis, a literary phenomenon known as ‘slum fiction’ emerged in the 1880s and remained popular until the end of the century. Its writers (such as Walter Besant, George Gissing, and Arthur Morrison) were inspired, perhaps, by the social journalism of Henry Mayhew and James Greenwood.⁸² The latter journalist is particularly interesting to this discussion since he was a friend to MacDonald. In his biography, Greville MacDonald claims that it was probably due to this particular friendship that his father embarked upon an ‘intimacy with disreputable London’ (*GMDW*, 320). Known as the ‘Amateur Casual’, Greenwood once pretended that he was a ‘casual worker’ by donning ragged clothes and spending a night in a Lambeth workhouse. He published the details of his experience in ‘A Night in a Workhouse’ (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 1866). Inspired by his method of donning a disguise, it became common for

⁸¹ Alan Mayne, *The Imagined Slum: Newspaper Representation in Three Cities, 1870-1914* (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1993), p. 130.

⁸² For further discussion regarding ‘slum fiction’ novelists, see David Trotter, *The English Novel in History, 1895-1920* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 116; P.J. Keating’s *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 167 and ‘Fact and Fiction in the East End’ in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, II, pp. 585-602, pp. 597-600.

‘slum novelists’ to voluntarily relocate to London’s East End in order to gain more vivid perspectives of life in the slums, which were then sensationalised. Their novels were styled to blend fact with fiction.⁸³ Incredibly, what may have been a potentially dangerous practice of acquiring literary material was not limited solely to male novelists; brave female writers also donned shabby disguises and spent entire nights in some of London’s most notorious districts. The first of these was Margaret Harkness, a journalist who intentionally moved into Octavia Hill’s Katherine Buildings in the East End to observe the domestic lives of the working-class poor. Her findings generated several ‘slum novels’, such as *In Darkest London* (1889), which highlighted the endeavours of the Salvation Army in the East End.⁸⁴

Not surprisingly, the ‘slum novelists’ exploited the poor in some ways. According to Peter Keating: ‘The language they use to describe even a commonplace event serves to glorify their own special qualities: they seem never to walk or ride into a slum, they “penetrate” it’; yet, ‘The most spectacular aspect of the explorer’s role was not in simply examining and writing about the lives of the poor, but becoming temporarily one of them’.⁸⁵ He adds later:

The feeling is widespread that so great is the gulf between classes that some kind of new identity is needed if communication with the poor is to be made on any level other than the philanthropic or patronizing. Attempted disguise is as much an attempt to break from one form of status as it is to adopt the trappings of another. (*Into Unknown England*, 18)

All in all, the quality of life in the East End was utterly separated from that of the more fashionable West End.

Next, attention cast upon London’s slum districts resulted in a new and controversial form of entertainment known as slum tourism that became popular amongst the upper classes.

⁸³ Herman Ausubel and Louis L. Snyder, *The Late Victorians* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1955), p. 30.

⁸⁴ *In Darkest London* was originally published as *Captain Lobe: A Story of the Salvation Army* under the pseudonym John Law.

⁸⁵ Peter Keating, ed., *Into Unknown England, 1866-1913: Selections from the Social Explorers* (n.p.: Fontana, 1976), p. 16.

The East End attracted mass numbers of these tourists (called ‘slummers’) who, like the ‘slum writers and novelists’, disguised themselves in shabby clothes and walked amongst the poor, all for the sake of seeing the living appearance of total destitution.⁸⁶

More importantly, hundreds of humanitarian groups flocked to London’s East End and other slum districts scattered around the city. It was not uncommon for social workers, such as Octavia Hill, Beatrice Webb, and others, to sometimes relocate, temporarily, to these districts in order to produce accurate assessments of family life in the slums as well as to discover how and why the slums originated.⁸⁷

MacDonald was not oblivious to the critical state of urban poverty in London’s East End. Like several novels of Dickens, MacDonald’s ‘London novels’ can arguably be read as precursors to the popular ‘slum novels’ of the 1880s and 1890s due to their vivid portrayal of the slums and its people. His knowledge of East End neighbourhoods, such as Shoreditch and Bethnal Green, is apparent as early as the 1860s in *Robert Falconer* and his heroine in *The Vicar’s Daughter* is a female philanthropist who establishes a permanent residence in a slum building so as to gain a fuller sense of trust amongst the poor. However, unlike the ‘slum novelists’ and upper-class slummers, there is no evidence to suggest that MacDonald ever lived (or even spent a night) in any of the slum districts. Yet, MacDonald’s knowledge of what was happening in the East End was not formed solely by the media; instead, it was shaped by his friendships with James Greenwood and Octavia Hill.

⁸⁶ See Wohl, *The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London*, p. 215. For a larger account of nineteenth-century slumming, see Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004).

⁸⁷ See Koven, p. 10.

Part Three

Urban Philanthropy in *Robert Falconer*, *The Vicar's Daughter*, and *Weighed and Wanting*⁸⁸

Despite those negative qualities of the city that were given by Defoe and other novelists listed above, the eighteenth-century city promoted higher education, national growth, financial prosperity, and artistic cultivation. Country life, on the other hand, was considered to be socially inferior: those who lived in the country were seen as uneducated, poor, crude, and lacking sophistication.⁸⁹ A noticeable shift occurred in the earlier half of the nineteenth century when novels began illustrating much darker aspects of the city. Signs of poverty, decay, and disease became increasingly apparent, especially within the London fiction of Dickens. He drew more inspiration from the city than the country, believing in the need for people to have human society and mutual support.⁹⁰

A devout reader and admirer of Dickens, MacDonald illustrates similar ideas in his 'London novels' using strong-hearted characters who try to make their community in London a better place. Yet, Esther Summerson was infected with a disfiguring disease (probably smallpox) as a result of her philanthropy work in *Bleak House* (1853): there was a sacrifice that social workers had to make. MacDonald was well aware of the physical dangers social workers encountered in fulfilling their responsibilities and the risk of infection when visiting poor

⁸⁸ Some of the discussion regarding *The Vicar's Daughter* appeared as an earlier draft in my article, 'George MacDonald's Approach to Victorian Social Reform in *The Vicar's Daughter*' in *Rethinking George MacDonald: Contexts and Contemporaries*, ed. by Christopher MacLachlan, John Patrick Pazdziora, and Ginger Stelle (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2013), pp. 69-83.

⁸⁹ For literary examples and a thorough discussion of this representation, see U.C. Knoepfelmacher, 'The Novel between City and Country' in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, II, pp. 517-36, pp. 518-20.

⁹⁰ See Philip Collins, 'Dickens and London' in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, II, pp. 537-57, pp. 547-51; and Robert L. Patten, "'A Surprising Transformation": Dickens and the Hearth' in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, pp. 153-70, pp. 168-70.

families living in unsanitary conditions is clearly visible in *Weighed and Wanting*.⁹¹ At one point in the novel, a character named Major Marvel tries to dissuade the heroine, Hester Raymount, from entering houses with smallpox. She refuses to desist from what she believes to be Christ's work and claims that God will take care of her as he took care of Christ while he was on earth. She says:

I don't want to fare better, that is, I don't want to have more of God's care than [Christ] had. [...] Did he keep him what you call safe? [...] Did he not allow the worst man could do to overtake him? Was it not the very consequence of his obedience? (WW, Chapter XXXIX, 'The Major and the Small-Pox', 398)

Marvel misinterprets Hester's meaning and assumes that she wants to die of smallpox as a martyr. But Hester's reply reveals that martyrdom is not the driving-force behind her mission: her only wish is to be a fellow-worker with Christ by bringing about God's will. She claims:

To that, and that alone, have I made up my mind. If I die of the small-pox, it will not be because it could not be helped, or because I caught it by chance; it will be because God allowed it as best for me and for us all. [...]

I think [...] whoever lives in terror of infection had better take it and have done with it. I know I would rather die than live in the fear of death. It is the meanest of slaveries. [...]

What we've got to do we just go and do, without thinking about danger. I believe it is often the best wisdom to be blind and let God be our eyes as well as our shield. (WW, Chapter XXXIX, 'The Major and the Small-Pox', 399-401)

Hester bases her argument solely on faith and though MacDonald's spares her health in the novel, he still makes the point that she, like Esther Summerson, conquers her fear of death and disease in order to fulfil what she believes is her duty to Christ.

At another point in the novel, Hester kisses the forehead of a poverty-stricken man who is grieving the death of his son. Concerning this action, MacDonald writes:

Many are called but few are chosen. Hester was the disciple of him who could have cured the leper with a word, but for reasons of his own, not far to seek by such souls as Hester's, laid his hands upon him, sorely defiling himself in the eyes of the self-

⁹¹ George MacDonald, *Weighed and Wanting* (London: Sampson Low Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1882; reprinted by Whitethorn: Johannesen, 1996); cited as WW, see Chapters XXXVII-XXXIX.

respecting bystanders. The leper himself would never have dreamed of his touching him. (WW, Chapter XLIII, 'Deliverance', 435)

The open and personal act of Christ physically *touching* a sick person was seen by MacDonald as a signifier of true love. Hester's action of touching (kissing, in this case) a potential carrier of disease, puts her not only in danger of the disease but also in danger of social judgment. One of the novel's characters believes that by serving the needy, she is actually breaking certain laws of propriety. He feels that society should shun the poor, especially those who are sick, claiming:

Those dens ought to be rooted out! Philanthropy was gone mad! It was strict repression that was wanted! To sympathize with people like that was only to encourage them! Vice was like hysterics—the more kindness you showed the worse grew the patient! They took it all as their right! And the more you gave, the more they demanded—never showing any gratitude [...]. (WW, Chapter XXXVIII, 'In the House', 394)

MacDonald could be representing what he assumed was society's argument for not aiding the poor. The disgust that this character exhibits clearly reveals that he is not concerned with anything other than his own personal gain.

Another *infectious* metropolitan malady that would have especially captured MacDonald's attention is also found in *Bleak House*: materialism. This idea is best exhibited by the character Richard Carstone. Despite his likable qualities, Richard is fatally attracted to the promised fortune that the settlement of the 'Jarndyce and Jarndyce' legal case would bring. Yet, after discovering that the exorbitant costs of the case have reduced the settlement to nothing, he collapses, losing the will to live. Dickens's lesson is plain to see: the promise of individual wealth is an empty hope. Thus, Richard has become a victim of both the physical and spiritual snares of the city. It is this particular spiritual *snare* that we find MacDonald warning his readers about most often throughout his writing. Indeed, he was much less concerned with the risks of poverty, physical disease and infection than he was with spiritual corruption. *Mammon*, which he saw as the root of materialism, was more detrimental to one's health because it was a canker to

the spiritual soul rather than the physical body. And, like poor Richard, MacDonald's characters are sometimes fatally attracted to empty promises which life in the city presents. Nor was MacDonald as interested in legal matters and political manoeuvres as was Dickens. In fact, in MacDonald's fiction, most crimes are generally rectified without the attention of the law. He was far more concerned with the spiritual rehabilitation of the wrongdoer.

MacDonald's London offers much temptation for material gain to his city-dwelling characters. He sometimes parallels the idea that *moving up* in the natural world means *moving down* in the spiritual world. Tom Worboise of *Guild Court*, for example, is bored with the monotony of his clerkship and, after spending time with the wrong sort of friends, begins to desire personal wealth. He first falls into gambling debt, then robbery. Frightened and ashamed of his crime, he escapes to the East End docks in order to hide his guilt. It is only through the endeavours of Lucy Burton and an urban clergyman that Tom is able to repent of his crime and restore himself to society.

Yet, as Chapter One has argued, MacDonald's writing was torn between the realist and romantic modes of the novel. For some nineteenth-century writers, such as Gaskell, Trollope, and George Eliot, the realistic novel was better suited to raising public awareness and critiquing societal problems regarding the economy, industrialism and philanthropic issues, whereas the romance, a mode revitalised in the nineteenth century by a renewed interest in Medieval Romance, Pre-Raphaelite art, and Tennyson's poetry, allowed writers, such as Dickens and Thackeray, the freedom to allegorise key spiritual themes which diverge from the modes of literary realism.⁹² Like Dickens, MacDonald combined literary realism with romance for an

⁹² See Maurice Larkin, *Man and Society in Nineteenth-Century Realism: Determinism and Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 1-2; Pam Morris, *Realism* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 21, 77-8, and 86; Gillian Beer, *The Romance* (London: Methuen, 1970), pp. 18, 20-1, and 60-9; and Barbara Fuchs, *Romance* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 79 and 81.

introspective depiction of life caught between two worlds, the spiritual and the physical, where the actions occurring in one world inevitably affect the other.

Always seeking to illustrate the ways of God, MacDonald found inspiration from his philanthropic friends such as Hill, Ruskin, Maurice, the Mount-Temples, and others, to formulate the idea that true Christianity is an *active* religion. What is most required of man, he believed, is obedience to the will of God, even obedience over fear of death and disease, and to always do one's duty by faithfully serving others. Such obedient servant-hood represents the commission of Christ to his disciples (Matthew 28.18-20). It is from this idea that the emphasis upon social work as a Christian service arises in the novels discussed below. For the sake of time and space, the following pages offer a brief summary and introduction to these novels.

Robert Falconer is the first of these. Though not a 'London novel' in the strict sense, the final third is centred in London and offers vivid descriptions of squalid life in the East End. The novel begins with the boyhood adventures of Robert Falconer, his education, his love for music, and his friends and acquaintances. The first two thirds of the book depict his spiritual growth and refinement in Rothieden and the Swiss Alps. Perhaps the most important secondary character is Mrs Falconer, Robert's grandmother. Though devoted to her grandson, she is a stern Calvinist and conceals her affection. Robert eventually learns that his father, Andrew, abandoned him and went to London, and that Mrs Falconer believes that Andrew has fallen from God's grace and is thus condemned to spend eternity in hell. As the novel progresses, Robert leaves Scotland in search of his father. At first, this is his sole mission; yet, whilst roaming the East End, he begins to work for the betterment of its people by establishing himself as a freelance doctor and social worker. In many ways, *Robert Falconer* is MacDonald's primary illustration of effective social reform. Robert defines MacDonald's perception of the ideal Christian hero as one who is

spiritually driven to do God's work in London and exhibits a profound longing to serve those who are most in need of help. In this novel, correlations are made between MacDonald's observations of social reformers such as Octavia Hill (with a particular emphasis on her housing scheme) and his perception of how Christ's ministry *could* be active in London. By creating a model character that exemplifies Christ-like servant-hood, MacDonald demonstrates his idea of what could be a better treatment for the suffering poor.

MacDonald returns to the East End and slum dwellings in *The Vicar's Daughter*, though its descriptions of urban poverty are not nearly as vivid as those shown in *Robert Falconer*. The novel completes the trilogy of *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood* (1867) and *The Seaboard Parish* (1868), and is narrated by Wynnie Percivale who relates the various events of the first few years of her marriage. Unfortunately, *The Vicar's Daughter* has long been overlooked as few scholars have attempted to raise it from obscurity.⁹³ Yet, despite this, it is the greatest of MacDonald's 'London novels' and reveals significant insight into his ideals of humanitarianism. In the following discussion of this novel, parallels are made between the subject of reform and MacDonald's theory of the divine imagination given in his essay 'The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture' (published a few years prior to the novel). These parallels illustrate that quality of life for the working-class poor can be improved by way of art, music, literature, and natural beauty. MacDonald, like so many others during his time, felt that these conveyed moral messages to the public and incorporated these issues through the social work of Marion Clare, the philanthropic heroine of the novel. Like Robert Falconer, Marion learns that, in order to fully help the poor, she has to come to an understanding of their humanity and their need for

⁹³ Ginger Stelle, 'The Exemplary Deviant: Wynnie as a Symbol of Victorian Womanhood in *The Vicar's Daughter*' in *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, 24 (2005), pp. 51-60; Jeffrey W. Smith, 'George MacDonald's Approach to Victorian Social Reform in *The Vicar's Daughter*' in *Rethinking George MacDonald: Contexts and Contemporaries*, ed. by Christopher MacLachlan, John Patrick Pazdziora, and Ginger Stelle (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2013), pp. 69-83.

compassion. For Marion, the best way to aid their social progress is to target their souls instead of offering them monetary gifts. She accomplishes this by providing them with exposure to natural beauty, music and other fine arts, thereby initiating imaginative growth.

The novel is also notable due to MacDonald's representation of Octavia Hill as the prototype for Marion. That MacDonald used Hill as a prototype for Marion has already been suggested by Robert Lee Wolff; yet, Wolff does not provide any insight regarding Hill's place in the novel as the author's representation of how to approach urban poverty and social work (296). Basing such an attractive and colourful character on Hill and incorporating her philosophy of social reform into the novel is evidence that MacDonald held her endeavours in high regard; additionally, it illustrates his own personal concerns with the need for better treatment of the lower social classes. Hill's mission appears to have been in accordance with MacDonald's spiritual theories. What he observed in her life and works mirrored his spiritual philosophy of Christ's humanitarianism, promoting the view of an ideal Christian servant who rises to the status of hero by working to improve the spiritual and physical welfare of the community. It will be argued that although Marion may have been modelled after Hill, the Hill that MacDonald portrays in *The Vicar's Daughter* has been perfected to exemplify social reform through spiritual development, targeting the souls of the poor as well as their physical needs.

The third novel that will be included in this discussion is *Weighed and Wanting*, which, interestingly, diverges from the social optimism of the two prior works.⁹⁴ At the time of this novel's publication, the period saw an increasing number of purpose-driven social workers flooding into London's East End districts. Some of these groups attempted to bring social change by developing better housing and sanitation schemes, whereas other groups neglected the

⁹⁴ To my knowledge, only one publication has been solely devoted to this novel: Adelheid Kegler's article, 'Mariana Leaves the Moated Grange: The Social Revolutionary Ethics in *Weighed and Wanting*', *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, 12 (1993), pp. 25-42.

physical predicament of the slums and sought only to bring a spiritual sense of revival. Empowered by religiosity, Bible-tract women and other like-minded groups invaded the homes of the poor, offering nothing more than scriptures and overly-religious reading material. Indeed, *Weighed and Wanting* is the darkest of the ‘London novels’, wherein MacDonald’s estimate of what it takes to become an effective social worker is more difficult to express and his earlier idealism changes to become slightly pessimistic. Consequently, the gentle emergence of a heroic social worker is not presented; rather, more emphasis is placed upon the personal sacrifice that is required to effectively serve others. Though MacDonald’s attitude is not exactly pessimistic, it is decisively adamant that the current level of provision for the poor in London is not nearly as effective as it should be. MacDonald proposes, instead, that all of humanity is bound as a holy family under the universal parentage of God and that the only way to truly minister to those who are suffering is to acknowledge them as family and to offer human compassion. This, he believes, is the key to their spiritual hope and encouragement. Anything short of this will lead to utter failure for both the social worker and the community which he or she seeks to serve.

The novel tells the story of Hester Raymount, a young female who is sensitive to the condition of urban poverty in London and decides to become a social worker. However, her family belongs to the upper-middle classes of the West End and is not concerned with alleviating the woes of the lower classes. The privileges they enjoy cause Hester to feel guilty and she challenges their opinions by forcing them to aid her social endeavours, which end in failure. However, despite her rough beginnings as an amateur philanthropist, Hester meets Dr Christopher who mentors her and cultivates her ability to help the poor with greater effect. He is similar to Robert Falconer and to Dr Allan Woodcourt in *Bleak House*—like them, he is a doctor who works almost exclusively with the poor. Additionally, he is reflective of Mr Blackstone in

The Vicar's Daughter and Alexander Graham in *The Marquis of Lossie*, for he is also an urban clergyman who preaches at a small chapel hidden within one of London's communities nestled somewhere within the East End. He believes that the soul is the primary element in need of healing; and so, while tending to the poor's medical needs, he also ministers to their spiritual conditions.

Of these novels, *Robert Falconer* was favoured by Queen Victoria, who gave a copy to each of her grandsons (Raeper, *George MacDonald*, 340). Yet, what may be of greater importance to this discussion is the novel's significance to Florence Nightingale. Not only was she a great enthusiast for MacDonald's novels, but she also saw an image of herself in Robert's character. Using her personal copy of the novel, she marked out the hero's name and replaced it with the letter *F*, signifying her own name, and replaced 'he' and 'his' with 'she' and 'her'.⁹⁵ Her actions clearly indicate more than simple admiration for the novel; instead, she exemplifies a desire to internalise the text as a guide for her future actions. This is perhaps the strongest example, but there is at least one other example when a notable person found MacDonald's work to be an influence in the development of his or her social views. George Kennion, the Bishop of Adelaide, confessed that the impression of *Sir Gibbie* weighed so heavily upon his conscience that it 'made him refuse a very rich London living that was offered him, although he was poor—a very different thing [...] from a Colonial Bishopric' ('Greville MacDonald to Louisa MacDonald, 7 January 1883', in *Rems*, 182).

The following analysis probes the various social issues, such as effective charity and housing reform, in these novels. Although representations of these issues are significant points of action and plot development, they are simply outward representations of MacDonald's much

⁹⁵ Lynn McDonald, in her exhaustive 16 volume compilation of everything Florence Nightingale wrote, *The Collected Works of Florence Nightingale*, has reprinted these annotations in *Florence Nightingale's Theology: Essays Letters and Journal Notes*, Vol. 3 (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2002), pp. 627-32.

deeper, inward concerns. When considering the social philosophies of his philanthropic heroes and heroines, a deeper perspective emerges involving MacDonald's personal theology and his theories of the divine imagination, as well as its practical application to the betterment of society.

The Philanthropists

Greville MacDonald acknowledges the importance of Robert Falconer's character by implying that he 'remained his author's type of what a man might be' (*GMDW*, 321). His word choice is curious, especially when emphasis is placed on the phrase: 'what a man might be'. Indeed, Robert's prototype was based on what MacDonald believed to be the ideal Christian life. This is represented in the novel through the mouth of a poverty-stricken child who reverently proclaims at one point: 'He's Jesus Christ' (*RF*, Part III, Chapter XI, 'The Suicide', 509). MacDonald saw Christ as a *divine* social worker who trained his disciples to fulfil his mission by working for the good of humanity. In *Robert Falconer*, it is clear that MacDonald intends his hero to be Christ *in action*. Yet, MacDonald intends to illustrate something greater than Robert's social and spiritual ideology. Believing that mankind is ever on a journey towards perfection in Christ, MacDonald uses Robert as a symbol of hope, whose ultimate mission is to draw humanity back to the fatherhood of God. Whilst physically serving the poor, Robert helps others to understand that they must, likewise, serve their neighbours.

Robert's youth and early adulthood contain experiences in the Scottish countryside that test and strengthen his idealistic longings, and, it is within these trials that he advances from being the novel's protagonist to its hero. MacDonald explains Robert's awakening as that which exemplifies 'the greatest need that the human heart possesses—the need of the God-Man' (*RF*, Part I, Chapter XVIII, 'Nature Puts in a Claim', 154). The process that represents Robert's

spiritual maturation is outlined in MacDonald's essay, 'A Sketch of Individual Development' (1880). The subject of the essay illustrates the growth of man and culminates with his spiritual perfection, which consists in learning truth through obedience. Having once encountered Nature and realising *why* it is beautiful, the awakening child-mind:

desires a deeper waking, longs for a greater beauty, is troubled with the stirring in his bosom of an unknown ideal of Nature. Nor is it an ideal of Nature alone that is forming within him. A far more precious thing, a human ideal namely, is in his soul, gathering to itself shape and consistency. (*Orts*, 'A Sketch of Individual Development', 49)

This inspires the newly-awakened mind to 'be a champion of the weak, a friend to the great; for both he would fight—a merciless foe to every oppressor of his kind. He would be rich that he might help, strong that he might rescue' (*Orts*, 'A Sketch of Individual Development', 50). For MacDonald, the growth of the hero begins, simply, with a great longing after an ideal of the soul. In some novels, such as *Wilfrid Cumbermede* (1872) and others that will be discussed in the following chapter, Nature is the agent that initiates this sense of longing; in other novels, characters such as Margaret Elginbrod in *David Elginbrod* (1863), Lucy Burton in *Guild Court* (1868), Mary Marston in *Mary Marston* (1881), and Barbara Wylder in *There and Back* (1891) are inspired by Nature but require some form of guidance, usually British or German Romantic poetry, to help them understand a deeper meaning in its purpose and existence.

Yet, for MacDonald, having a desire for original truth is not enough; Robert's philosophy demonstrates that one must *actively* seek truth by working for the good of others. Robert uses his profession as a doctor and social worker to love and serve London's lowest classes of society. Through Robert's actions, MacDonald illustrates what he feels is a better method for slum reformation. Only a heart longing for such service, MacDonald believes, is truly able to draw closer to God and to attain harmony with his divine will.

MacDonald declares in his 'Sketch of Individual Development' that 'Oneness with God is the sole truth of humanity', and that 'no man can be one with neighbour, child, dearest, except as he is one with his origin; and he fails of his perfection so long as there is one being in the universe he could not love' (*Orts*, 'A Sketch of Individual Development', 74-5). The single thing in Robert's life that he cannot forsake is the search for his father. But the search for his father is not an obstacle to his community service, for it is only by befriending and aiding the slum dwellers that Robert can attain any hope of ever finding him. MacDonald writes: 'in all that region of London [the blackest and most forsaken corners of the East End] it became known that the man who loved the poor was himself needy, and looked to the poor for their help. Without them he could not be made perfect' (*RF*, Part III, Chapter XI, 'The Suicide', 494). In order to achieve his work in the East End, Robert has to forfeit his ranking in society and become a 'slummer'.

The meaning of Robert's resolve becomes clear when he is approached by a wealthy, would-be social worker, named Lady Georgina Betterton. Lady Georgina is bored with life and believes that doing social favours for the community would be a thrilling adventure. She approaches Robert, offering her naive scheme and money—both of which he flatly refuses. During the course of their conversation, Robert points out that, regardless of her money, which he believes would do nothing to properly help the poor, the air of her arrogant condescension would always remain apparent to those whom she sought to serve. Robert tells her: 'If you cannot hope for them in your heart, your hands cannot reach them to do them good. They will only hurt them' (*RF*, Part III, Chapter X, 'A Neophyte', 487). He claims that if she is truly willing to help them, then she must first be their friend; no other medium, such as monetary

donations or any other acts of good intentions, will be acceptable (*RF*, Part III, Chapter X, ‘A Neophyte’, 488)

In *The Vicar’s Daughter*, Marion Clare relinquishes her social position in order to further her humanitarian service. This is illustrated when Marion is discharged from her position as piano instructor of a young child, whose wealthy parents discover that Marion resides in an *unrespectable* house.⁹⁶ Though MacDonald suggests that Marion is not offended, his point is clear that an effective social worker must make material sacrifices. In his essay, ‘True Christian Ministering’ (1893), MacDonald explains the biblical duty of the Christian servant and proposes that divine service is opposed to materialism. As discussed in Chapter One, MacDonald personifies nineteenth-century materialism as *mammon*, which was far from unusual at the time. He argues that effective Christian ministering means rising above self-interest, even to the point of forfeiting one’s place in society. Additionally, he argues that the closer an individual comes to achieving Christ-likeness, the more service is required (*Orts*, ‘True Christian Ministering’, 299-300).

In his essay, MacDonald claims that the first step to be taken on the spiritual journey begins with a willingness to unite with one’s fellow beings. This is paramount. A true Christian servant must fully comprehend the shared brotherhood with all humanity. In *Robert Falconer*, MacDonald clearly confirms his belief that no good can be given to those in need ‘save through individual contact—through faith, in a word—faith in the human helper—which might become a stepping-stone through that chaotic misery towards faith in the Lord and in his Father’ (*RF*, Part III, Chapter XI, ‘The Suicide’, 491). Comprehending this theology aids the understanding of

⁹⁶ George MacDonald, *The Vicar’s Daughter* (London: Tinsley Bros., 1872; reprinted by Whitethorn: Johannesen, 1998); cited as *VD*, Chapter XV, ‘Rumors’, p. 102.

MacDonald's Christian ideology, especially when we consider his reaction to urban poverty in the metropolis.

This theology is found elsewhere in MacDonald's writings. In 1867, he published the first series of his *Unspoken Sermons*. Two of the sermons, entitled 'Love Thy Neighbour' and 'Love Thy Enemy', emphasise his belief that all humanity is connected in spirit by God. MacDonald writes: 'In God alone can man meet man. In him alone the converging lines of existence touch and cross not'.⁹⁷ MacDonald emphasises that his readers should love their neighbours, not because God requests it, but because it should be natural. His theology claims: 'That we are the sons and the daughters of God born from his heart, the outcoming offspring of his love, is a bond closer than all other bonds in one', and, 'For our love to each other is but the throbbing of the heart of the great brotherhood, and could come only from the eternal Father, not from our parents' (*US1*, 'Love Thy Neighbour', 141). Moreover, MacDonald writes that all barriers preventing love towards a neighbour must be obliterated. Thus, he suggests that even in the worst enemy, there is a shadow of God's uncorrupted creation. MacDonald writes: 'It is not the unfriendly, the unlovely, that we are told to love, but the brother, the sister, who is unkind, who is unlovely'; then, 'When he is clothed in his right mind, he will be a person indeed. You *could* not then go on hating him. Begin to love him now, and help him into the loveliness which is his'.⁹⁸ This is the only way by which the barriers of contempt can be cleared and the so-called enemy can be restored.

MacDonald exhibits this theological point using a rather striking characteristic of Hester Raymount's unique imagination in *Weighed and Wanting*. Due to the acute sensitivity she feels

⁹⁷ George MacDonald, 'Love Thy Neighbour' in *Unspoken Sermons*, Series 1, 2, and 3 (London: Alexander Strahan and Longmans, Green, 1867, 1886, and 1887; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2004); cited as *US1*, *US2*, or *US3*, *US1*, pp. 128-47, p. 133.

⁹⁸ George MacDonald, 'Love Thy Enemy' in *US1*, pp. 147-56, p. 151.

towards human pain and suffering, she is able to mentally place herself in another's position in order to gauge and interpret their feelings. MacDonald encourages this peculiarity of the imagination in his essay, 'The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture', arguing that the imagination connects man to God. In *Weighed and Wanting*, MacDonald proposes that a lively imagination, such as Hester's, is needed to have a deeper and fuller compassion for others. Thus, he goes beyond the thesis of his essay by suggesting that the imagination does not just connect man with God, but that it has the capacity to connect man with his fellow man.

Hester's ability to interpret the emotions within another's heart is illustrated early in the novel when she and her brother, Cornelius, visit a Magic Lantern show and lecture on *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The scene is rather humorous, as it depicts 'an old man, like a broken-down clergyman [...] flaunting a pretence of lecture on the scenes presented. Whether he was a little drunk or greatly in his dotage, it was impossible to determine' (WW, Chapter III, 'The Magic Lantern', 33). The confused lecturer tries to relate historical events to *The Pilgrim's Progress* in order to outline his opinions concerning apocalyptic prophecy. All the while, he continues making apologies for the things he has forgotten whilst reminding his listeners that he was once a scholarly fellow in his younger days. MacDonald writes that Cornelius could hardly contain his laughter whereas Hester is solemnly depicted with tearful eyes: 'The misery of the whole thing was too dreadful to her!' (WW, Chapter III, 'The Magic Lantern', 35). She feels heartbroken due to the dilapidation of the whole affair; the building, the blatant lack of attention by the audience, the dirty white neckcloth tied around the speaker's throat—all this she observes and then imagines how it must seem through the eyes of the old man. In her mind, she begins to wonder whether there is a comfortable home for him to return to after his failed lecture and whether he

will be greeted with a warm meal carefully prepared by a loving wife. His professional success matters little to her; it is his personal happiness upon which she dwells.

Hester's ability to place herself in the lecturer's position, being able to channel his broken life and dreams, causes her to question her theology. As soon as she leaves the lecture hall and steps outside, she looks up to heaven, asking:

were there not thousands equally and more miserable in the world—people wrapped in no tenderness, to whom none ministered, left it not driven [...] to fold themselves in their own selfishness? And was there nothing she, a favoured one of the family, could do to help, to comfort, to lift up one such of her own flesh and blood?—to rescue a heart from the misery of hopelessness?—to make this one or that feel there was a heart of love and refuge at the centre of things? (WW, Chapter III, 'The Magic Lantern', 37)

These questions mark a turning point in Hester's spirituality. She begins to formulate the idea that God may be seen as a universal parent and that all of humanity is connected to him as his children and to each other as siblings. This realisation challenges the theology of her family and society, which unabashedly claims that there are those who will spend an eternity with God in heaven whilst others are damned to eternal suffering in hell. Overcome with the belief that she is spiritually bound to her universal siblings, she determines that she will minister to the needs of the world. MacDonald, as narrator, then confesses:

I well remember feeling as a child that I did not care for God to love me if he did not love everybody: the kind of love I needed was love essential to my nature—the love of me, a man, not of me a person—the love therefore that all men needed, the love that belonged to their nature as the children of the Father, a love he could not give me except he gave it to all men. (WW, Chapter III, 'The Magic Lantern', 37)

MacDonald's confession here is not new; rather, this spiritual ideology is found in his earliest writings such as *Within and Without* (1855) and *David Elginbrod* (1863). What makes the confession stand apart here is that Hester believes she now has a spiritual obligation to serve the poor and uses MacDonald's ideology as the basis of her social work in London's East End.

Furthermore, Hester's spirituality is not grounded on religious principles but on compassion for her fellow man. MacDonald writes elsewhere that 'whatever we call religion will

vanish when we see God face to face’.⁹⁹ This is also demonstrated in the novel, where MacDonald suggests that commonplace religiosity inflicted upon the poor opposes Christ’s ministry. During a later scene in the novel, Hester and Vavasor (a quasi-villain who tries to win Hester’s affection by pretending that he supports her social concerns) are discussing the ills of industrialism when the latter makes a reference to the people who are affected by it, calling them ‘human rubbish [...] which gathers in our great cities, and gives so much labor in vain to clergyman and philanthropist!’ (WW, Chapter XXVI, ‘Waiting a Purpose’, 260). Hester is hurt by his feelings of social superiority and counters his remark by declaring: ‘None but God can read in a man what he really is. It can’t be a safe thing to call human beings, our own kith and kin, born into the same world with us, and under the same laws of existence, *rubbish*’ (WW, Chapter XXVI, ‘Waiting a Purpose’, 261).

Two points arise here. First, Hester believes that the reason so many impoverished families are berated is due simply to religious dogmatism. MacDonald writes that she

firmly believed that the clergy were very near the root of the evil; and that not with the hoe and weeder, but with the watering pot and artificial manure, helping largely to convert the poor—into beggars, and the lawless into hypocrites, heaping cairn upon cairn on the grave of their poor prostrate buried souls. (WW, Chapter XXVI, ‘Waiting a Purpose’, 260)

MacDonald depicts religious condescension as a barrier to effective social work. To contrast religiosity, MacDonald uses the character of Dr Christopher as a champion to illustrate what he believes to be the proper, Christ-like response of what the Church should be doing.

Second, Hester realises that the Church can never really alleviate urban suffering unless its members first acknowledge the poor as part of their family. Rebutting Vavasor, Hester defends the poor by claiming them as her own. Clearly, MacDonald’s intention here is to

⁹⁹ George MacDonald, *The Elect Lady* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1888; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2003), p. 165.

demonstrate that humanitarian relief begins first with human compassion: ‘Love, and love alone, as from the first it is the source of all life, love alone, wise at once and foolish as a child, can work redemption’ (WW, Chapter XXVI, ‘Waiting a Purpose’, 263).

Housing Reform

By the time MacDonald wrote and published *The Vicar’s Daughter*, he had lived at the ‘Retreat’ in Hammersmith for about five years and was continuing to cultivate his friendship with Hill. As was discussed above, both he and his family were active volunteers for Hill and her fellow-workers and he often opened his aptly-named house to receive her tenants as his personal guests. As well, broader knowledge of Hill’s activism was steadily increasing. She produced several reports promoting the need for housing reform in London in the latter part of the 1860s. These were eventually compiled and published as *Homes of the London Poor* (1875). Her housing schemes had a theological impact on the development of MacDonald’s social concerns and her articles compiled in *Homes of the London Poor* are represented in *The Vicar’s Daughter* as one of the key activities of Marion Clare. A detailed discussion of this relationship will follow.

Yet, before MacDonald published this novel, he had begun to explore the issue of housing and slum reformation in *Robert Falconer*. MacDonald paints a picture of the East End which is full of suffering and despair through his narrator, one of Robert’s disciples. Possibly the grisliest passage in all of MacDonald’s fiction is given by the narrator who describes one of his midnight walks ‘through the Region of the Seven Dials’ thus:

Here and there stood three or four brutal-looking men, and now and then a squalid woman with a starveling baby in her arms, in the light of the gin-shops. The babies were the saddest to see—nursery-plants already in training for the places these men and women now held, then to fill a pauper’s grave, or perhaps a perpetual cell—say rather, for the awful spaces of silence, where the railway director can no longer be guilty of a worse

sin than house-breaking, and his miserable brother will have no need of the shelter of which he deprived him. Now and then a flaunting woman wavered past—a *night-shade*, as our old dramatists would have called her. I could hardly keep down an evil disgust that would have conquered my pity, when a scanty white dress would stop beneath a lamp, and the gay dirty bonnet, turning round, reveal a painted face, from which shone little more than an animal intelligence, *not* brightened by the gin she had been drinking. Vague noises of strife and of drunken wrath flitted around me as I passed an alley, or an opening door let out its evil secret. Once I thought I heard the dull *thud* of a blow on the head. The noisome vapours were fit for any of Swedenborg's hells. There were few sounds, but the very quiet seemed infernal. The night was hot and sultry. A skinned cat, possibly still alive, fell on the street before me. Under one of the gas-lamps lay something long: it was a tress of dark hair, torn perhaps from some woman's head: she had beautiful hair at least. Once I heard the cry of *murder*, but where, in that chaos of humanity, right or left, before or behind me, I could not even guess. *Home* to such regions, from gorgeous stage-scenery and dresses, from splendid, mirror-beladen casinos, from singing-halls, and places of private and prolonged revelry, trail the daughters of men at all hours from midnight till morning. Next day they drink hell-fire that they may forget. Sleep brings an hour or two of oblivion, hardly of peace; but they must wake, worn and miserable, and the waking brings no hope: their only known help lies in the gin-shop. (*RF*, Part III, Chapter XI, 'The Suicide', 495-6)

The area of the Seven Dials was part of the St Giles neighbourhood, and was one of London's most notorious slums in the nineteenth century. MacDonald's depiction of it in the novel echoes Charles Dickens's treatment of it in his novel, *Sketches by Boz* (1839). Henry Mayhew also describes the area in his *A Visit to the Rookery of St Giles and its Neighbourhood* (1860). As well, MacDonald may have been thinking of William Hogarth's famous etchings, *Four Times of the Day: Noon* (1738), *Gin Lane* (1751), and *First Stage of Cruelty* (1751), all of which depict the area as a rough and morally depraved place in society.

For the most part, the poor suffer the lack of safe and suitable housing. Robert witnesses their suffering:

through the rapacity of the holders of small house-property, and the utter wickedness of railway companies, who pulled down every house that stood in their way, and did nothing to provide room for those who were thus ejected—most probably from a wretched place, but only to be driven into a more wretched still. To provide suitable dwellings for the poor he considered most pressing of all necessary reforms. His own fortune was not sufficient for doing much in this way, but he set about doing what he could by purchasing houses in which the poor lived, and putting them into the hands of persons whom he could trust, and who were immediately responsible to him for their proceedings: they had to make them fit for human abodes. (*RF*, Part III, Chapter XI, 'The Suicide', 492)

MacDonald is clearly referencing Hill's initial housing experiment with Paradise Place.

There are other and even more striking plot parallels with the novel and Hill's work. In 1866, Hill defended her housing experiment with an appalling description of an interview she once had with a landowner/undertaker who gained profits from the deaths of his tenants when he unashamedly proclaimed, 'Yes, miss; of course there are plenty of bad debts. It's not the rents I look to, but the deaths I get out of the houses' (*Homes of the London Poor*, 20). Hill was horrified by this and used it as an example to illustrate a sadistic side of *mammon*-worship.

Likewise, MacDonald was affected by Hill's experience and retold the interview in his novel. Seeking properties to buy for his housing scheme, Robert encounters one particular block that is severely dilapidated: 'a shame that belonged more to the owner than the inhabitants' (*RF*, Part III, Chapter XI, 'The Suicide', 492). Instead of repairing the tenements' lodgings and ensuring that they are fit for human survival, the owner simply waits for the lodgers to die and then claims a higher fee to bury them. Mirroring Hill's interview, MacDonald writes that the landlord diabolically gloats: 'But it's the funerals, sir, that make it worth my while. I'm an undertaker [...]. I count back-rent in the burying. People may cheat their landlord, but they can't cheat the undertaker. They *must* be buried. That's the one indispensable—ain't it, sir?' (*RF*, Part III, Chapter XI, 'The Suicide', 493). Repulsed by the monstrous confession, Robert informs the owner that he is a lawyer and will prosecute him, claiming: 'It'll take a good penny from the profits of your coffins to put those houses in a state to satisfy the inspector' (*RF*, Part III, Chapter XI, 'The Suicide', 493). MacDonald concludes the episode with the owner selling the block 'and no longer in that quarter killed the people he wanted to bury' (*RF*, Part III, Chapter XI, 'The Suicide', 493).

The longer Robert resides in London, the more he begins to understand that poor housing lies at the root of urban poverty. Thus, he makes the provision of adequate housing an integral part of his humanitarian endeavours. In one evening scene, he is walking with the novel's narrator, discussing the present condition of the London slums. The narrator mentions that the 'civilised people of London' ought to sweep them out of the city. Robert disagrees and criticises the current treatment of the poor by legalistic, religious groups as a poor attempt towards social reform. Robert responds:

It is a mercy they do not. They would only do infinite mischief. The best notion civilization seems to have is—not to drive out the demons, but to drive out the possessed; to take from them the poor refuges they have, and crowd them into deeper and more fetid hells—to make room for what?—more and more temples in which Mammon may be worshipped. The good people on the other hand invade them with foolish tracts, that lie against God; or give their money to build churches, where there is as yet no people that will go to them. Why, the other day, a young clergyman bored me, and would have been boring me till now, I think, if I would have let him, to part with a block of my houses, where I know every man, woman, and child, and keep them in comparative comfort and cleanliness and decency, to say no more, that he might pull them down and build a church upon the site—not quite five minutes' walk from the church where he now officiates. (*RF*, Part III, Chapter XI, 'The Suicide', 500)

Robert's critique alludes to the mass invasion of the slum districts by various missionaries who deposited biblical tracts rather than providing practical care. In *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), MacDonald refers to these tracts as 'ill-bred though well-meant shabby little books,' which the poor 'were sure to hate the sight of' (*ABNW*, Chapter XVIII, 'The Drunken Cabman', 179).

A little further onwards, the two men pass by a neighbourhood which becomes one of the most infernal descriptions of London written in all of MacDonald's fiction. The narrator describes how there 'were ragged women within [gin houses] who took their half-dead babies from their bare, cold, cheerless bosoms, and gave them of the poison of which they themselves drank renewed despair in the name of comfort' (*RF*, Part III, Chapter XI, 'The Suicide', 501). The narrator goes on to illustrate how:

the little clay-coloured baby-faces made a grimace or two, and sank to sleep on the thin tawny breasts of the mothers, who having gathered courage from the essence of despair, faced the scowling night once more, and with bare necks and hopeless hearts went—whither? Where do they all go when the gin-hells close their yawning jaws? Where do they lie down at night? They vanish like unlawfully risen corpses in the graves of cellars and garrets, in the charnel-vaults of pestiferously-crowded lodging-houses, in the prisons of police-stations, under dry arches, within hoardings; or they make vain attempts to rest the night out upon door-steps or curbstones. All their life long man denies them the one right in the soil which yet is so much theirs, that once that life is over, he can no longer deny it—the right of room to lie down. Space itself is not allowed to be theirs by any right of existence: the voice of the night-guardian commanding them to move on, is as the howling of a death-hound hunting them out of the air into their graves. (*RF*, Part III, Chapter XI, ‘The Suicide’, 501)

The latter part of the narrator’s description is reminiscent of Jo’s plight in *Bleak House* as the policeman who kept him on the move eventually led to the poor boy’s death. Though it was published in 1853, MacDonald could be revealing the influence of *Bleak House* on *Robert Falconer*. MacDonald’s theology emphasises that since all beings are spiritually bound to one another, love must always reach to those who suffer. Pain can never be eradicated; yet, man has a spiritual obligation to serve the humanity of which he is a part.

In *The Vicar’s Daughter*, MacDonald illustrates Hill’s housing scheme directly through the social endeavours of Lady Bernard, one of the novel’s secondary characters. Greville MacDonald claims that Lady Bernard is based on Lady Byron, who was instrumental in his family’s relocation to London and remained his father’s patroness until her death in 1860 (*GMDW*, 306-13). There is, however, more to be discovered here which Greville has not seen. Lady Bernard is also partly modelled on Ruskin. Just as Lady Bernard is responsible for funding Marion’s housing complex in the novel, so was Ruskin responsible for funding Hill’s initial housing schemes. In the novel, Marion’s concerns for her ‘grandchildren’ (the families under her care) lead her to establish a housing project for them and other families whose homes have been crushed by the industrial railway—a recurring image from *Robert Falconer*. Lady Bernard and

Marion formulate an arrangement that both mirrors and idealises Ruskin's and Hill's housing scheme at Paradise Place. MacDonald details the plan in his novel this way:

Each family is to have the same amount of accommodation it has now, only far better, at the same rent it pays now, with the privilege of taking an additional room or rooms at a much lower rate. Marion has undertaken to collect the rents, and believes that she will thus in time gain an additional hold of the people for their good, although the plan may at first expose her to misunderstanding. From thorough calculation she is satisfied she can pay Lady Bernard five per cent for her money, lay out all that is necessary for keeping the property in thorough repair, and accumulate a fund besides to be spent on building more houses, should her expectations of these be answered. The removal of so many will also make a little room for the accommodation of the multitudes constantly driven from their homes by the wickedness of those, who, either for the sake of railways or fine streets, pull down crowded houses, and drive into other courts and alleys their poor inhabitants, to double the wretchedness already there from overcrowding. (VD, Chapter XLIV, 'The Dea Ex', 387)

Two points must be addressed here. First, MacDonald is exhibiting concern over the negative effects of industrialism. Second, MacDonald demonstrates his belief that man must work and pay for what he receives. This is one of the essential points of the novel and is illustrated with Lady Bernard's insistence upon the working poor being made to pay for their housing. Likewise, Ruskin was adamant that Hill's tenants pay for their housing and suggested the same return figure of five percent, claiming that the scheme would be far more advantageous to the poor.¹⁰⁰ Hill records that Ruskin once told her 'that a working man ought to be able to pay for his own house; that the outlay upon it ought, therefore, to yield a fair percentage on the capital invested' (*Homes of the London Poor*, 18).

Though Hill was originally reluctant to enforce payment, she afterwards began to see the good effects of this structure, for, by paying, the working poor were able to earn what would be theirs and no longer feel anchored by charity. Hill writes:

I have tried to remember, when it seemed hardest, that the fulfilment of their duties was the best education for the tenants in every way. It has given them a dignity and glad feeling of honourable behaviour which has much more than compensated for the apparent harshness of the rule. (*Home of the London Poor*, 19)

¹⁰⁰ See *Homes of the London Poor*, p. 18, for a detailed description of Ruskin's financial plan.

In addition to collecting rent, Hill used these opportunities to encourage and cheer her tenants.¹⁰¹ Although the element of mutual trust took some time to be established, Hill believed that by encouraging her impoverished families to earn what they were given, she was therefore helping them to acquire a greater sense of self-respect.

Interestingly, MacDonald, who had always preached against financial assistance to the poor in his earlier novels, uses money as the means to provide help to the poor in *Weighed and Wanting*. In the earlier part of his life, Dr Christopher inherited a great sum of money from his wealthy grandfather and believed that the only possible use for it would be the betterment of humanity; therefore, he saved it until the proper use for it should appear. Thus, the effective use of money comes only through the thoughtful planning of Dr Christopher, who declares: ‘God who has laid the burden on me will enable me to bear it until he shows me how to unpack and disperse it’ (WW, Chapter XLVIII, ‘Mr. Christopher’, 505). One of the early ways he put his money to humanitarian use was by entering medical school, believing that by doing so he was ‘repaying to the race what had been wrongfully taken from its individuals to whom it was impossible to restore it’ (WW, Chapter XLVIII, ‘Mr. Christopher’, 505). His mentality echoes MacDonald’s narration earlier in the novel: ‘Only man can help man; money without man can do little or nothing, most likely less than nothing’ (WW, Chapter XII, ‘A Beginning’, 128). MacDonald’s point is that if one should truly wish to serve his neighbour, then he must become involved in active service rather than simply laying out money.

Another example in the novel that MacDonald uses to suggest the effective use of money comes by way of Major Marvel, a secondary character who buys Mr Raymount’s London house and then gives the deed to Hester. She and Dr Christopher then open the house as a make-shift

¹⁰¹ For Hill’s approach to her tenants, see M.J. Daunton’s *House and Home in the Victorian City: Working Class Housing, 1850-1914* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), pp. 140-1.

hospital to serve the poor. Although MacDonald's use of money as a means of bringing about the final, positive outcome in the novel may seem to represent a change of heart from his earlier perceptions, he is still very careful to stress the importance of using money wisely; it must always be spent as Christ would have spent it. MacDonald concludes his novel with a picture that is strikingly characteristic of the Holy Trinity (I John 5.7-8). He highlights the idea of perfect servant-hood: 'Hester laboured, and Christopher laboured. And if one was the heart and the other the head, the major was the right hand' (WW, Chapter LX, 'A Birthday Gift', 625). Although it may be argued that Dr Christopher and Hester, much like Robert Falconer's team of fellow-workers, could remain successful social workers in the East End without financial support, MacDonald's change of heart reveals that the condition of urban poverty by the 1880s was just too great to manage effectively without significant funding.

Charity

Although MacDonald clearly approved of financial support for social reform, he discouraged the practice of giving alms or monetary hand-outs. This attitude stemmed directly from Hill's philosophy of social reform, which suggested that monetary gifts may actually hinder the progressive growth of the working poor. Hill designed a theoretical argument to persuade the upper classes to help the working class poor whilst refraining from monetary gifts. Hill's brother-in-law, C. Edmund Maurice, writes that she

believed in personal and sympathetic intercourse with the poor, as far more important than any organisation; and that, where co-operation and organisation were necessary, she preferred small local efforts to great centralised schemes. At the same time, she felt that the giving of money, when dissociated, as it too often is, from real sympathy, does infinite harm, and should be checked by reformers of charity. (257)

Her argument was presented in a paper to the Social Science Association in 1869, entitled 'The Importance of Aiding the Poor without Almsgiving'. It specifies that although systems may be

set in place to effect some change for the needy, and may offer some help, the full range of transforming aid will be limited unless each individual or family is targeted: ‘the ground of which can be perceived only by sweet subtle human sympathy, and power of human love’ (in C. Edmund Maurice, 257-8). Thus, Hill proposes that each case should be given personal precedence according to the situation. Remarking upon Hill’s treatise, E. Moberly Bell states that the ‘principles here laid down were implicit in all Octavia’s work’, emphasising that money given solely to meet bodily needs would serve to do harm if it did not aid spiritual needs, which was of ‘supreme importance’ (108). MacDonald echoes this point in *The Vicar’s Daughter*, revealing the extent to which he understood Hill’s designs. Though monetary aid may temporarily ease suffering, MacDonald believed that human compassion and encouragement to develop the imagination would have far greater effects for the good of society.

Each of the main characters in *The Vicar’s Daughter* must realise that when considering proper aid for the poor, money alone can do little good. The reason is that the poor require human recognition more than financial aid. During a dinner conversation between two vicars, Mr Walton and Mr Blackstone, the subject of almsgiving arises. Mr Blackstone, an urban clergyman who works in the London slums, declares how ‘alms from any but the hand of personal friendship tend to evil, and will, in the long run, increase misery’ (VD, Chapter XIII, ‘My First Dinner-Party.—A Negatived Proposal’, 91). He implies that what the poor truly need is human compassion and recognition. Marion makes this need explicitly known later in the novel when she mirrors Blackstone’s thought that monetary offerings may serve no good. Her defence is:

When compassion itself is precious to a man, [...] it must be because he loves you, and believes you love him. When that is the case, you may give him any thing you like, and it will do neither you nor him harm. But the man of independent feeling, except he be thus your friend, will not unlikely resent your compassion, while the beggar will accept it chiefly as a pledge for something more to be got from you; and so it will tend to keep him in beggary. (VD, Chapter XXI, ‘Lady Bernard’, 163)

Marion adds that ‘the true way is to provide them with work, which is itself a good thing, besides what they gain by it’ (*VD*, Chapter XXI, ‘Lady Bernard’, 163-4). With this example, MacDonald critiques the impersonal act of handing out monetary tokens. He believed that, although meant with the best of intentions, it would deny the poor the divine right of labour, completely disrupting their journey towards human perfection.

In *Robert Falconer*, the hero illustrates MacDonald’s theory by offering the poor opportunities for work whilst refraining from giving monetary hand-outs. MacDonald writes that Robert:

nowise abandoned his conviction that whatever good he sought to do or lent himself to aid must be effected entirely by human influence. [...] Money he saw to be worse than useless, except as a gracious outcome of human feelings and brotherly love. He always insisted that the Saviour healed only those on whom his humanity had laid hold; that he demanded faith of them in order to make them regard him, that so his personal being might enter into their hearts. (*RF*, Part III, Chapter VII, ‘The Silk-Weaver’, 440-1)

Equally important is Robert’s belief in the people’s need for labour. Following Carlyle’s theory of ‘work’, MacDonald claims that there is a divine connection between labour and Christ-likeness in his essay, ‘True Christian Ministering’, suggesting that one may begin to learn how to serve others by engaging them in work.¹⁰²

As part of their spiritual growth, MacDonald’s philanthropic heroes and heroines must develop a clear understanding of labour (i.e. the task which is divinely intended for each individual as opposed to the idea of earning a living). Robert obtains this knowledge initially whilst meditating in the Swiss Alps and dedicating each day to reading and studying the New Testament. MacDonald writes that Robert discovers one day:

That he should do the work, such as recorded, and much besides, that the Father gave him to do—this was the will of God concerning him. With this perception arose the

¹⁰² In his *Past and Present*, Carlyle declares that ‘All true Work is sacred; in all true Work, were it but true hard labour, there is something of divineness’ (Book III, Chapter 12, ‘Reward’). This idea is also implied throughout the writings of Ruskin. Like many other Victorians, MacDonald’s perception of labour as a positive component in social reform was inspired by such ideas.

conviction that unto every man whom God had sent into the world, he had given a work to do in that world. He had to lead the life God meant him to lead. The will of God was to be found and done in the world. (*RF*, Part III, Chapter I, 'In the Desert', 398-9)

Though his primary task is to locate and restore his father, Robert's additional 'work' is to help make the East End slums a better place for its residents.

Knowing that he cannot fulfil this work alone, Robert gathers a group of fellow-workers and trains them in ways whereby they may likewise serve their community. MacDonald writes:

By degrees, without any laws or regulations, a little company was gathered, not of ladies and gentlemen, but of men and women, who aided each other, and without once meeting as a whole, laboured not the less as one body in the work of the Lord, bound in one by bonds that had nothing to do with cobweb committee meetings or public dinners, chairmen or wine-flushed subscriptions. They worked like the leaven of which the Lord spoke. (*RF*, Part III, Chapter XI, 'The Suicide', 493-4)

MacDonald is creating a symbol here to represent Christ and his circle of disciples, whose lives were commissioned to a life-long ministry. Additionally, MacDonald appears to be advocating Hill's reformatory schemes and her volunteer group of fellow-workers of which he and his family were a part. Yet, he is adamant that there are essential lessons required for each person to achieve in order to be a genuine disciple or fellow-worker with Christ. For instance, one particular individual, whom Robert had been aiding, is greatly reprimanded over the apparent neglect of his neighbours. A poor and starving landlord, De Fleuri, feels that it is his lot to suffer and accepts his fate with a stoic resolve. However, MacDonald does not suggest that his stoicism is the mark of a hero. Since De Fleuri is resolved to suffer, he neglects to ease (or perceive for that matter) the suffering of his tenants. During a conversation with him, Robert commends his stoicism yet gently remarks that he should not ignore his tenants' needs. Refusing to take poverty as an excuse, Robert convinces him to do good for his neighbours by talking with them and doing small tasks to help make their dwellings more suitable such as filling in the holes in their

walls to keep them safe from the rats (*RF*, Part III, Chapter VII, ‘The Silk-Weaver’, 444-6). This, for MacDonald, was the applied definition of charity.

Spiritual Reformation

In both *Robert Falconer* and *The Vicar’s Daughter*, MacDonald addresses various points of housing reform and the importance of labour, both of which he argues are principal factors in aiding the spiritual well-being of an individual. Yet, more than these issues, MacDonald was concerned with the spiritual reformation of humanity. In *The Vicar’s Daughter*, MacDonald develops his theory of the divine role of the imagination as represented by Marion’s unique interactions with the individuals under her care. This is a crucial point for MacDonald since he implies that the development of the imagination: ‘is one of the main ends of the divine education of life with all its efforts and experiences. Therefore the first and essential means for its culture must be an ordering of our life towards harmony with its ideal in the mind of God’ (*Orts*, ‘The Imagination’, 36). Using Marion as the instrument to demonstrate the theory previously described in ‘The Imagination’, MacDonald illustrates that the working man, when placed in an environment that is conducive to the development of his own imagination, will achieve a far better good than only having his physical needs met. In his essay, MacDonald argues that the imagination of man is divinely linked with the imagination of God and that as God is ever thinking and creating, so does man think and create. God’s imagination flows into man’s imagination. In addition to this, MacDonald intensifies this theory by proposing that ‘Man is but a thought of God’ (*Orts*, ‘The Imagination’, 4). Therefore, according to MacDonald, all things originate from God. The purpose of man’s imagination, then, is to actively pursue the things which bring him closer to God (*Orts*, ‘The Imagination’, 2).

In *Weighed and Wanting*, Dr Christopher's theology claims that truth, regardless of its source, points to the divine. MacDonald makes a similar claim later in *The Flight of the Shadow* (1891):

Truth is at the root of all existence, therefore everything must come right if only we are obedient to the truth; and right is the deepest satisfaction of every creature as well as of God. [...] If things be not as we think, they will both arouse and satisfy a better *think*, making us glad they are not as we expected.¹⁰³

Additionally, both Dr Christopher and Marion Clare share the same theory that truth can be obtained from the imagination—and that the imagination guides the thinker to inquire after the things of God. Dr Christopher discusses this theory with Hester when he describes Michelangelo's art in the Sistine Chapel, which he interprets to be a representation of man's relationship with God. He tells her:

You must have noticed then how the Father is accompanied by a crowd of young ones—come to help him make Adam, I always think. The poet has there, consciously or not, hit upon a great truth: it is the majesty of God's great-heartedness, and the majesty of man's destiny, that every man must be a fellow-worker with God, nor can ever in less attain his end, and the conscious satisfaction of being. I want to help God with my poor brothers. (WW, Chapter XLVIII, 'Mr. Christopher', 501-2)

He teaches Hester that all men are connected under the single parenthood of God and that 'the only thing worth giving the energy of a life to, was the work that Christ gave himself to—the delivery of men out of their lonely and mean devotion to themselves, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, whose joy and rejoicing is the rest of the family' (WW, Chapter XLVIII, 'Mr. Christopher', 504-5).

In *The Vicar's Daughter*, Marion exemplifies this ideology by performing music recitals for the poor.¹⁰⁴ MacDonald's family acted on this idea a few years later with the Musical Branch of the Kyrle Society. Like other characters in MacDonald's fiction, Marion has come to

¹⁰³ George MacDonald, *The Flight of the Shadow* (London: Kegan Paul, 1891; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2001), Chapter V, 'My First Secret', p. 44.

¹⁰⁴ For a complete discussion regarding music appreciation and social class, see Derek B. Scott, *The Singing Bourgeois: Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room and Parlour*, 2nd edn (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 207-21.

understand that God can be found via the arts, especially in music. In the novel, her music offers a healing power. As Marion is telling her story to Wynnne Percivale, the novel's narrator, Marion refers to Lady Bernard's encouragement to her to play the piano for hospitalised children.

Marion adds:

For she [Lady Bernard] had a strong belief that there was in music a great healing power. Her theory was, that all healing energy operates first on the mind, and from it passes to the body, and that medicines render aid only by removing certain physical obstacles to the healing force. She believes that when music operating on the mind has procured the peace of harmony, the peace in its turn operates outward, reducing the vital powers also into the harmonious action of health. (VD, Chapter XIX, 'Her Story', 145-6)

The healing power of music is seen in MacDonald's earliest publications *Within and Without* (1855, Part V, Scene II) and *Phantastes* (1858, Chapters V, XIX, XX, XXI, and XXII) and derives partly from his interpretation of the biblical story about David soothing King Saul's tumultuous mind (1 Samuel 16.23). MacDonald could have also been thinking about the mystical role that music plays in German Romantic literature.

Later in the novel, Lady Bernard purchases a building where Marion can offer wholesome entertainment to the poor. Towards the end of one evening, a clergyman, 'who knew how to be a neighbour to them that had fallen among thieves,' offers a few words of instruction and encouragement without being dogmatic (VD, Chapter XX, 'A Remarkable Fact', 159). Overall, Marion's method of social interaction with the poor is reminiscent of MacDonald's understanding of Christ's humanitarian philosophy. She states her purpose thus:

My teacher taught me that the way for *me* to help others was not to tell them their duty, but myself to learn of Him who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. As I learned of him, I should be able to help them. I never had any theory but just to be their friend,—to do for them the best I can. When I feel I may, I tell them what has done me good, but I never urge any belief of mine upon their acceptance. (VD, Chapter XIX, 'Her Story', 152)

This confession is later illustrated when Marion encounters a drunken husband who had just struck his wife. Instead of preaching to the wretched man, she invites him up to her room so that

he might hear her play the piano. Leaving the stricken wife behind, with a request for her to come up shortly afterwards, Marion begins playing softly for him. Eventually the man falls asleep under her soothing, improvised melody. MacDonald writes:

She sung and prayed both in one then, and nobody but God heard any thing but the piano. Nor did it impede the flow of her best thoughts, that in a chair beside her slumbered a weary man, the waves of whose evil passions she had stilled, and the sting of whose disappointments she had soothed, with the sweet airs and concords of her own spirit. (VD, Chapter XXVII, 'Miss Clare amongst Her Friends', 234)

As Marion 'prays' out her music, the man unconsciously takes it in and wakes with a clearer mind. Marion asks him to consider visiting the National Gallery with his wife and the man consents. Whilst gazing at the art and discussing each painting, the couple begins to reconnect with each other and were never known to quarrel again (VD, Chapter XXVII, 'Miss Clare amongst Her Friends', 236). Though MacDonald's conclusion may seem ludicrous to modern readers, he was, nevertheless, maintaining the original purpose of the National Gallery, which was to make art accessible to the public when it opened in 1824. Likewise, when its present site at Trafalgar Square was chosen in 1832, it was with the intent of being accessible to both the upper classes of the West End and the poorer classes to the east.¹⁰⁵ Most importantly, the primary intention of making art accessible was that it would convey a moral influence on the masses. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, this idea was questioned by art critics such as Walter Pater and Théophile Gautier and a new concept for art arose with the slogan, *l'art pour l'art* ('art for art's sake'), arguing that art does not convey morals and should not be governed by didactic forces.

MacDonald never accepted this concept and always believed that art should be used as if it was a moral compass. In his 'Preface' to Karl Emil Franzos's novel *For the Right* (1888),

¹⁰⁵ For a thorough history of the National Gallery and the social reasons for its construction, see Brandon Taylor, *Art for the Nation: Exhibitions and the London Public, 1747-2001* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999), pp. 33-43.

MacDonald claims: ‘For the more evident tendency of art has for some time been to an infinite degeneracy. The cry of “Art for art’s sake”, as a protest against the pursuit of art for the sake of money or fame, one can recognize in its half wisdom, knowing the right cry to be, “Art for truth’s sake!”’¹⁰⁶ In *The Vicar’s Daughter*, MacDonald suggests that the imagination, when applied to art and natural beauty, has the potential to reach even the working class poor who may have no knowledge of theory or symbolism. For MacDonald, the imagination is all that is needed to turn a developing mind to the inquiry of spiritual truth.¹⁰⁷

In the novel, MacDonald offers a few in-depth descriptions of the work of Percivale, Wynn timer’s husband, who is an artist. Early in the novel, Percivale admits that his art is inspired by love for his wife; it is his love ‘which enabled him to see not only much deeper into things, but also to see much better the bloom that hangs about every thing, and so to paint much better pictures than before’ (*VD*, Chapter II, ‘I Try’, 16). MacDonald’s point is direct. It is out of Percivale’s love that his art springs; thus, his theory and perception of beauty comes from God. Percivale is able to see more clearly because his imagination has been cultured and tuned by his spiritual self. In ‘The Imagination’, MacDonald explains this visionary point, stating that a man may perceive the world around him in accordance to his imagination; that ‘the world around him is an outward figuration of the condition of his mind’ and that this world serves mankind (*Orts*, ‘The Imagination’, 5). MacDonald clarifies this point by adding later, ‘For the world is [...] the human being turned inside out. All that moves in the mind is symbolized in Nature,’ and that the ‘forms of Nature are the representations of human thought in virtue of their being the embodiment of God’s thought’ (*Orts*, ‘The Imagination’, 9 and 18). By emphasising that all things are initially derived from God’s imagination, MacDonald then draws attention to the point

¹⁰⁶ George MacDonald, ‘Preface’ in Karl Emil Franzos, *For the Right*, trans. by Julie Sutter (Harper & Brothers: New York, 1888), pp. v-x., p. v.

¹⁰⁷ This theory is also expressed in *Orts*, ‘The Fantastic Imagination’, p. 319.

that it is man's duty to seek out and find the source from whence his ideas have sprung. MacDonald writes, 'The man, then, who, in harmony with nature, attempts the discovery of more of her meanings, is just searching out the things of God' (*Orts*, 'The Imagination', 18).¹⁰⁸

MacDonald is actually contributing to a larger idea that was emerging during the latter half of the nineteenth century. In her pamphlet, *Colour, Space, and Music for the People* (1884), Hill attempts to argue that art encourages man to think about God, and to thereby grow closer to him. She claims that uplifting and colourful art is especially needed in hospitals and names the 'Hospital for Accidents' at Poplar. She goes on to write that the hospital has applied to the Kyrle Society for decorations, but that the Society needed financial help from the public to fulfil their mission.¹⁰⁹ Hill's desire to decorate hospitals with art demonstrates the idea that art and beauty are good for the soul. Though art in hospitals may not aid the physical body, it does, as Hill is trying to suggest, aid the human imagination through 'vivid and abiding images which penetrate deep through organs formed to be links between God's visible world and [human] minds' (*Colour, Space, and Music for the People*, 2).

In *The Vicar's Daughter*, MacDonald represents his interpretation of what social reform could be, by introducing the request that the poor be given aid to help develop their imaginations. Doing so would instil in them a desire and passion to seek out that which inspires beauty. This is the key to understanding MacDonald's idea: 'To inquire into what God has made is the main function of the imagination' (*Orts*, 'The Imagination', 2). Marion refrains from rebuking the drunken husband or offering dogmatic sermons to the people under her care; instead, she uses the

¹⁰⁸ For an extended discussion of MacDonald's theory of the imagination and the role of fine art in the latter part of the nineteenth century, see my article, 'Pre-Raphaelite Imagery in the Writings of George MacDonald: Representations in "The Imagination", *The Seaboard Parish* and *The Vicar's Daughter*', *Journal of the Scottish Society for Art History*, 17 (2012), pp. 14-8.

¹⁰⁹ Octavia Hill, *Colour, Space, and Music for the People*, reprinted from *Nineteenth Century*, May 1884 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1884), p. 2

tools that inspire imaginative development to encourage the people to think for themselves and to seek out the source from whence their passions originate: God.

To help develop the perception of beauty in poor people, Marion suggests that in lieu of money, a more beneficial solution for improving slum neighbourhoods would be the provision of natural beauty such as flowers, claiming: ‘All the finer instincts of their being are drawn to the surface at the sight of them. [...] A gift of that sort can only do them good’ (*VD*, Chapter XXI, ‘Lady Bernard’, 163). She insists that the poor need to experience and be surrounded by beauty, for in beauty they may develop their perceptions of God’s work in their lives. MacDonald explores this idea more dramatically in *Guild Court*, which is discussed at length in Part Three of the following chapter. In that novel, the philanthropic heroine, Lucy Burton, takes her subjects out of London and into the country, believing that fresh, clean air and open, green spaces are necessary components for initialising spiritual reformation (*GC*, Chapter XXVIII, ‘Mattie in the Country’, 195-205).

In *The Vicar’s Daughter*, the greatest example of Marion’s talent for developing a divinely-inspired imagination amongst the poor is the way in which she presents the Bible to her tenants. On one occasion, Wynn timer, the novel’s narrator, makes an appearance at one of Marion’s ‘conversation-sermons’. At first, she is surprised at what Marion is reading aloud to the poor. Instead of the New Testament, which would have been the obvious choice, Marion takes her reading from ‘The First Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ’, an early Gnostic gospel. Surprisingly, the reading serves a creative purpose, generating discussion among the listeners. Problems with miracles, existentialism, evil and the ‘Historical Jesus’ are discussed. Marion’s method of presenting biblical stories is esoteric but also innovative and full of psychological insight, encouraging her listeners to seek out the truth of the stories in relation to their own

imaginations. Marion does not merely offer lessons with an expected moral added at the conclusion; rather, she believes that if the listener can be brought to feel the truth of the story from within, it will have a greater impact.

In his *Reminiscences of a Specialist*, Greville MacDonald makes a similar point regarding the Salvation Army's emphasis upon morality. At one time, he was invited to give a few lectures on scientific subjects at the Burn Street Refuge (a dormitory run by the Salvation Army). After the sixth lecture, Greville's talk was criticised by one of the officers who only approved of the talks so long as one of the Salvationists were present to explain what it *meant* (*Rems*, 269). Greville, then, adds: 'I had thought I was doing precisely this thing—showing them what love and service and beauty meant! But the officers believed that without references to liquor, blasphemy and hell-fire, my words lacked force and *holiness*' (*Rems*, 269).

In 'The Imagination', MacDonald writes that God's art is in all things, whether it is discovered in Shakespeare's dramas, art, music or even the mere observation of the human race; additionally, to be at one with God is to develop the perception that all things are in motion and are progressing towards what God originally intended them to be (*Orts*, 'The Imagination', 3-5 and 22). MacDonald writes:

For the end of imagination is *harmony*. A right imagination, being the reflex of the creation, will fall in with the divine order of things as the highest form of its own operation; [...] will be content alone with growth towards the divine idea, which includes all that is beautiful in the imperfect imaginations of men; will know that every deviation from that growth is downward; and will therefore send the man forth from its loftiest representations to do the commonest duty of the most wearisome calling in a hearty and hopeful spirit. This is the work of the right imagination; and towards this work every imagination, in proportion to the rightness that is in it, will tend. The reveries even of the wise man will make him stronger for his work; his dreaming as well as his thinking will render him sorry for past failure, and hopeful of future success. (*Orts*, 'The Imagination', 35)

For MacDonald, 'Oneness with God is the sole truth of humanity. Life parted from its causative life would be no life; it would at best be but a barrack of corruption, an outpost of annihilation.

In proportion as the union is incomplete, the derived life is imperfect' (*Orts*, 'A Sketch of Individual Development', 74). In his essay on the imagination and in works such as *The Vicar's Daughter*, MacDonald theorises that the connection between God and man is able to be made by way of the properly developed imagination.

In contrast to the perhaps idealised portrayal of Marion's effectively-managed social 'entertainments', a rather sceptical depiction of similar events appears in *Weighed and Wanting*. Hester's first venture as an amateur social worker begins prematurely when she organises an evening of music at her family's home. MacDonald describes, in detail, the standard order of preparation for the party, such as Hester's arranging invitations and refreshments. Yet, despite her thoughtful planning and good intentions, the evening ends as a complete failure due to several reasons.

The first belongs to Mr Raymount's superciliousness which the visitors could easily detect. His sole willingness of allowing Hester to transform his house into a 'music hall' originates from his belief that the upper classes ought to approach the poor didactically, educating them of 'their wrongs and their rights' (*WW*, Chapter XVI, 'The Concert-Room', 179). Second, the house is thoroughly cleaned and richly decorated prior to the event. It may be that MacDonald is recounting an experience he once had whilst working with Hill and the Musical Branch of the Kyrle Society. MacDonald is suggesting here that although hosting a party at a grand location may appear to be a good idea, its grandeur has the potential to undermine the whole scheme for it is liable to remind the poor that this is not a place where they belong. Third, Hester invites several friends from her own social circle to attend the party as a personal favour. Yet, despite their preparations, several of the upper-class guests are thoroughly shocked at the apparent lack of control exhibited by the lower-classes throughout the evening. In fact, one of

upper-class guests arrives at the party without knowing she will be in the company of the poor.

MacDonald writes:

While she was drinking her second cup of tea her eyes kept roving. As she set it down, she caught sight of Long Tim, but a fortnight out of prison, rose at once, made her way out fanning herself vigorously, and hurried home boiling over with wrath [...]. The woman was not at all of a bad sort, only her dignity was hurt. (WW, Chapter XVI, 'The Concert-Room', 182)

Though the scene is a little humorous, MacDonald is clearly depicting the clash between two social classes with it. Fourth, Hester makes a strong attempt at introducing them to her interpretation of beautiful music. This is the fatal flaw because the poor guests are not accustomed to her musical preferences and are thus unable to appreciate the exceedingly long ballads she plays and sings for them on her piano. Although she is slow to perceive this, Hester invites one of her friends to sing a patriotic song, which is better received by the guests. Another individual, whom MacDonald writes as being 'well acquainted with the predilections of his audience', is next invited to sing a song (WW, Chapter XVII, 'An Uninvited Guest', 188). He chooses an overly-sentimental song to which MacDonald claims: 'the poor greatly enjoy having their feelings gently troubled. Thus the muse of the occasion was gradually sinking to the intellectual level of the company—with a consequence unforeseen, therefore not provided against' (WW, Chapter XVII, 'An Uninvited Guest', 188).

The 'consequence unforeseen' involves one of the guests, named Blaney, who, despite having not being invited to do so, makes a pitiful attempt to contribute to the evening's entertainment by singing a few songs which he had composed. Hester's family are repulsed by his comical manner of singing and assume that he is simply being vulgar. Despite their failed attempts at trying to make Blaney *stay in his place*, his insistence upon singing results in his being thrown out of doors by Mr Raymount. Naturally, this occurrence dampens the evening's mood as several of the guests sympathise with their ousted friend: 'Was he not the same flesh

and blood? [...] After the swells had had it all their own way so long, why shouldn't poor Blaney have his turn?' (WW, Chapter XVIII, 'Catastrophe', 193). Thus, the party comes to a sober ending.

MacDonald's attitude to this episode is apparent. Indeed, the man's comical attempt to challenge the 'high-brow' formality of the evening by singing 'low-brow' songs, and his reprimand at doing so (because he sought to step out of his place), suggests that the poor guests were, in fact, aware that they were not welcomed and neither social class was capable of appreciating or understanding the musical/cultural preferences of the other.¹¹⁰ As such, MacDonald is depicting that Hester, at this premature stage, is just simply not yet ready to meet the needs of the poor. Her attempt to pull them from their social class to hers fails because she does not understand them.

Despite the evening's failure, Hester perseveres in her belief that because she is part of a higher class, she is socially and spiritually obligated to help the poor in her city. Eventually, Mr Raymount inherits an estate in the country and the family moves out of London. Yet, Hester chooses to remain in London and uses her family's house as a make-shift hospital to house the poor during a smallpox epidemic.

Working with Dr Christopher, Hester formulates a theory that only human compassion can alleviate human pain and that the poor can never be *managed* by organisations founded upon commonplace religiosity. MacDonald illustrates this idea in a striking scene where Hester and Dr Christopher wait at the deathbed of a poverty-stricken woman who is in a state of despair and who moans dismally. Dr Christopher, aware that she is beyond all medical hope, offers her compassion with his reply: 'I can do nothing for you. I can only love you' (WW, Chapter XLVIII, 'Mr. Christopher', 488). Hester begins to sing a prayer-song to God, which comforts the

¹¹⁰ See Scott, *The Singing Bourgeois: Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room and Parlour*, pp. 207-21.

dying woman. MacDonald writes that her words ‘seemed to rise from some eternal deep within her, yet not to be of her making. She was in the immediate presence of Christ, pleading with him for the consolation and strength which his poor dying creature so sorely needed’ (*WW*, Chapter XLVIII, ‘Mr. Christopher’, 489). Hester’s prayer-song is reminiscent of those sung by Marion in *The Vicar’s Daughter* and young Diamond in *At the Back of the North Wind* (Chapter XXXVII, ‘Once More’). With these examples, MacDonald is suggesting that the power of music ministers to those who suffer by providing them with a sense of spiritual comfort in a time when physical aid is not adequate. Perhaps more importantly, MacDonald is claiming that it can awaken the personal, imaginative thought that connects man with God, which he sees as the greatest service that an individual can offer to another (*Orts*, ‘The Fantastic Imagination’, 319).

CHAPTER THREE

Nature

Introduction

On 9 December 1888, one of MacDonald's closest friends, Lord Mount-Temple (William Cowper-Temple), died. The same day, MacDonald wrote a comforting letter to his friend's wife, Lady Georgina Mount-Temple. In his letter, MacDonald does much more than offer condolences. He writes to her, claiming:

We are in a house with windows on all sides. On one side the sweet garden is trampled and torn, the beeches blown down, the fountain broken; you sit and look out, and it is all very miserable. Shut the window. I do not mean forget the garden as it was, but do not brood on it as it is. Open the window on the other side, where the great mountains shoot heavenward, and the stars, rising and setting, crown their peaks. Down those stairs look for the descending feet of the Son of Man coming to comfort you. This world, if it were alone, would not be worth much—I should be miserable already; but it is the porch to the Father's home, and he does not expect us to be quite happy, and knows we must sometimes be very unhappy till we get there: We are getting nearer. ('Letter to Lady Mount-Temple, 9 December 1888', in Sadler, 339-40).

MacDonald depicts a similar picture of the world for her in another letter: 'The universe would be to me no more than a pasteboard scene, all surface and no deepness, on the stage, if I did not hope in God' ('Letter to Lady Mount-Temple, 19 December 1888', in Sadler, 340). In these letters, MacDonald describes his way of seeing the world around him. By suggesting that the world is God's front 'porch', MacDonald is claiming that he sees the physical world and the spiritual world as being connected to one another. For him, if the spiritual world did not exist, then his life would not only be dull, but it would also not be worth living. Yet, when he looked around him, he saw a society that was fast succumbing to such despair. He attempted to counter this crisis of faith in his society by encouraging his readers to look beyond the surface of the world in order to see that their lives are connected to God and to each other. This fairly simple

idea is the foundation of MacDonald's social views and is explored throughout this chapter by examining Nature's portrayal in his fiction.

First, and foremost, MacDonald portrays Nature in his literature as a mirror that reflects the face of God. Second, MacDonald represents Nature as a physical place positioned in both space and time where a character can retreat in order to meditate upon his or her life's meaning as well as to understand his or her connection with God (e.g. obtaining spiritual renewal/harmony, finding universal truths, etc.). This idea is complicated in some novels by the emergence of the city, which disables access to Nature. Third, Nature is sometimes used to reflect a character's state of mind (i.e. innocence and child-likeness) and signifies that character's personal faith. Interestingly, there has been little discussion that seeks solely to uncover the significance of Nature in MacDonald's novels. Yet, much may be learned regarding MacDonald's theology and how his imagination was developed or enhanced by his society's reaction to Nature.

MacDonald responded to a society that, standing aghast at the decline of religious faith and the rise of scientific fact, desperately tried to hold on to a few ideas which suggested that the world had some spiritual meaning. Walter E. Houghton writes that even in the loss of this faith, there rose up in the Victorian period an 'intense will to believe' which strove to locate and produce 'tangible evidence of religious truth' (315). Houghton goes on to suggest:

When traditional faith declines and the Bible is reduced to a human document full of superstition and the Church is no longer a divine temple, God is sought in nature and in history. His spirit is felt rolling through all things or his beauty is found reflected in natural beauty; his will is seen active in human affairs, working out in time his divine purposes or fulfilling his moral law in the rise and fall of nations. (315)

Applying Houghton's argument to MacDonald appears to make much sense of his ideology—especially in light of Nature's portrayal in his fiction. MacDonald never failed to illustrate that he was compelled to bring society to a deeper appreciation of Nature, which would, in turn, lead it

to a fuller understanding of and perhaps a meaningful relationship to God. Furthermore, as Houghton structured his argument with Wordsworthian language ('[God's] spirit is felt *rolling through all things*'), so did MacDonald adapt Wordsworthian language to connect his thoughts to his own generation (as will be shown).

This chapter, broken into three parts, seeks to clarify why and how MacDonald chose to do this. Part One begins with a discussion on the figurative act of reading Nature as a 'book', arguing that despite MacDonald's originality regarding certain portrayals of God and Nature, he was actually drawing upon a much larger and older philosophy. Like John Ruskin, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, and so many other Victorian writers, MacDonald was influenced by Wordsworth's poetry. Therefore, if we are to understand the significance of Nature and its spiritual influence on society in MacDonald's thinking, it is imperative that we understand the way in which he interpreted Wordsworth in his writings.

Part Two discusses the role that Nature plays in MacDonald's theology. Naturally, the question of pantheism is the first to arise when discussions of theology and Nature come together. Indeed, there is more than a hint of pantheism suggested in MacDonald's literature and theology, most of which points to Wordsworth—but it does not end with him. MacDonald's pantheism, in some instances, is strikingly original. Nature, for him, is not just a place where God may be found; nor is it God himself. Instead, MacDonald writes that Nature is a product of God's imagination. To illustrate this argument, a discussion regarding the role of mountains, especially the Swiss Alps, in MacDonald's fiction is given.

Part Three looks back on the previous chapter regarding metropolitan philanthropy, but places emphasis on the environment and issues arising from environmental aspects of city life in the nineteenth-century. MacDonald perceived and wrote of Nature as a healing force that

promotes harmony with God. It is little wonder, then, that MacDonald writes of it as being a significant factor in maintaining a healthy life. Here, an argument shows that MacDonald was acutely aware of the lack of green spaces in London, as evidenced by his novel, *Guild Court*. The idea that MacDonald may have been interested in environmental reform has never been suggested; and, more importantly, *Guild Court*, unlike *The Vicar's Daughter* and *Weighed and Wanting*, has never been discussed.¹¹¹ Regardless, this novel is notable due to its remarkable portrayal of the congested nature of London's inner communities. Yet, the true value of this novel lies in MacDonald's critique of London's lack of green spaces and the physical and spiritual harm that the poor endure as a result.

Part One

'Prophets of Nature': George MacDonald and William Wordsworth

The concept of reading the signs of Nature has long been a part of religious and scientific history. Ernst Robert Curtius suggests that the interpretation of Nature using 'book' metaphors began during the Latin Middle Ages of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and claims: 'For the preacher the book of nature must figure with the Bible as a source of material'.¹¹² In other words, those seeking to decipher the mysteries of God must also look to Nature. Yet it was not until Conrad of Megenberg (1309-74) published *Buch der Natur* (*Book of Nature*) in 1305 that the

¹¹¹ To the best of my knowledge, only one discussion has ever been published on *Guild Court*, which is my 'The Polluted City and the Healing Power of Nature: Wordsworthian Idealism in *Guild Court*' in *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, 31 (2012), pp. 18-30.

¹¹² Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 320.

metaphor of reading Nature as a ‘book’ became popularised (Curtius, 321). Medieval theologians used this metaphor to cast an image of God as an author who had written his divine plan for life upon the physical foundations of the world. The concept that God wrote two books, scripture and Nature, became standardised amongst theologians and bled into Renaissance theology.

Peter Harrison, however, suggests that the concept of reading Nature as a book began much earlier with the Greeks and that the metaphor was adopted by the early Christian church.

According to Harrison:

the dualistic platonic tradition which had served as a point of departure for the various systems of Gnosticism also held for the Fathers of the Church the possibility of demonstrating the value of the material world. [...] God was said to have infused the created order with symbols, the highest purpose of which was to point beyond themselves to the superior world of spiritual realities. By attending to the spiritual meaning of physical objects, the soul might become familiar with higher truths.¹¹³

This concept became a prominent part of the theology in the early Christian church. Although God may have ‘infused’ the world with symbolic meaning, the question of how such symbols were to be interpreted became a problem. Harrison points to Origen (c.184-c.254) as the key individual who sought to unlock the mysteries of Nature (15). Though MacDonald may not have been especially influenced by Origen, there are some places where his and Origen’s theologies seem to converge.¹¹⁴ For instance, Origen’s theology supports universal salvation—that all creation, including Satan, will eventually return to God. MacDonald’s *Lilith* (1895) supports this theory. Despite Origen’s unconventional theology, which the Church chose not to accept, the belief that Nature was a manuscript written by God to guide his creation towards a fuller knowledge of his ways continued to survive to the nineteenth century.

¹¹³ Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2001), pp. 14-5.

¹¹⁴ See Raeper, *George MacDonald*, p. 243.

In addition to past theologians, the act of deciphering Nature has long been a literary pursuit, especially for the Metaphysical and Romantic writers, two groups that had a profound influence on MacDonald's work. The idea that Nature has a spiritual quality to it that affects our dreams, guides our sense of reason, and helps us to understand human society has been kept alive by poets, Gothic novelists, landscape painters, and most especially, Wordsworth—who has been regarded by many, including MacDonald, as the 'High Priest of Nature'. MacDonald claims this of Wordsworth in his first non-fantasy novel, *David Elginbrod* (1863).¹¹⁵ Yet, it was not until his essay, 'Wordsworth's Poetry' (1893), that MacDonald gives a full justification of why he gives Wordsworth this accolade. In his essay, MacDonald writes:

Now, Wordsworth is the high priest of nature thus regarded. He saw God present everywhere; not always immediately, in his own form, it is true; but whether he looked upon the awful mountain-peak, sky-encompassed with loveliness, or upon the face of a little child, which is as it were eyes in the face of nature—in all things he felt the solemn presence of the Divine Spirit. By Keats this presence was recognized only as the spirit of beauty; to Wordsworth, God, as the Spirit of Truth, was manifested through the forms of the external world.¹¹⁶

Though MacDonald here is applying a heavy measure of spirituality to Wordsworth's writings, his interpretation also reflects the way others saw him during the nineteenth century.

The attempt to read Nature's book can also be found in MacDonald's work. MacDonald alludes rather slightly to this issue in his sonnet, 'Nature a Moral Power' (1883), which is short enough to be quoted in its entirety:

Nature, to him no message dost thou bear
Who in thy beauty findeth not the power
To gird himself more strongly for the hour
Of night and darkness. Oh, what colours rare
The woods, the valleys, and the mountains wear
To him who knows thy secret, and, in shower,
And fog, and ice-cloud, hath a secret bower

¹¹⁵ George MacDonald, *David Elginbrod* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1863; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1995); cited as *DE*, p. 39. MacDonald makes a similar reference to this idea in his essay, 'Wordsworth's Poetry' (*Orts*, p. 247).

¹¹⁶ George MacDonald, 'Wordsworth's Poetry' in *Orts*, pp. 245-63, p. 247.

Where he may rest until the heavens are fair!
 Not with the rest of slumber, but the trance
 Of onward movement steady and serene,
 Where oft, in struggle and in contest keen,
 His eyes will opened be, and all the dance
 Of life break on him, and a wide expanse
 Roll upward through the void, sunny and green.¹¹⁷

MacDonald opens the sonnet by stating the dilemma of one unable to read the ‘message’ written upon Nature. Only the individual who looks upon Nature with ‘the trance | Of onward movement’ is capable of interpreting Nature correctly and of receiving its full benefits. The poem points not only to the dilemma of interpreting the ‘book’ of Nature, but it seems to suggest Wordsworth’s concept of observation: ‘While with an eye made quiet by the power | Of harmony, and the deep power of joy, | We see into the life of things’.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, Wordsworth claims the ‘book’ is able to provide humanity with ‘lessons of genuine brotherhood’—meaning that one of its purposes is to connect man with his fellow beings.¹¹⁹ MacDonald’s work reveals that he responded to Wordsworth’s interpretation and presented Nature as a tool that God uses to renew the world.

Remarkably, the ‘Book of Nature’ is never directly alluded to by MacDonald; however, its fundamental idea is found throughout his work, especially in his essay, ‘The Imagination: Its Functions and Its Culture’ (1867). In the essay MacDonald claims God as *the* original poet—that all literary works began, first, with him, and then trickled down to others such as Shakespeare and the like (*Orts*, ‘The Imagination’, 2-4). As well, MacDonald proceeds to extend the metaphor further, presenting God as an artist whose art is the out-flowing of his heart. In his essay, MacDonald writes: ‘His sculpture is not in marble, but in living and speech-giving forms,

¹¹⁷ George MacDonald, ‘Nature a Moral Power’ in *PW2*, p. 307.

¹¹⁸ William Wordsworth, ‘Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798’ in *Poetical Works*, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson and Ernest de Selincourt, new edn (London: Oxford UP, 1964); cited as ‘Tintern Abbey’, pp. 163-5, p. 164, lines 47-9.

¹¹⁹ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book VI, in *Poetical Works*, pp. 494-588, p. 535, lines 543-7.

which pass away, not to yield place to those that come after, but to be perfected in a nobler studio' (*Orts*, 'The Imagination', 4). In other words, MacDonald is suggesting the idea that God's art is life itself.

This theory of an 'out-flowing' from God's art and poetry is a crucial element for our understanding of how the 'Book of Nature' was interpreted by MacDonald. What we find in MacDonald's interpretation of Nature is not a replicated image of God's handwriting; instead, we find MacDonald's belief that Nature is an image cast from God's imagination and can, in turn, be used by his creation. MacDonald suggests:

For the world around [man] is an outward figuration of the condition of his mind; an inexhaustible storehouse of forms whence he may choose exponents—the crystal pitchers that shall protect his thought and not need to be broken that the light may break forth. [...] God has made the world that it should thus serve his creature, developing in the service that imagination whose necessity it meets. (*Orts*, 'The Imagination', 5)

Not all of his characters understand this concept, but for those that do, a desire to be a better person is formed within them.

Despite Wordsworth's title as the 'High Priest of Nature', we find few descriptions of landscapes or natural objects in his poetry; instead, we find that he was more concerned with representing the effects that Nature can have on the individual mind. MacDonald identified this element in Wordsworth's ideology and re-enacted it within his novels.

A good example of this is found in *The Seaboard Parish* (1868). The novel is a sequel to *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood* (1867), an English novel narrated by the Reverend Mr Walton, who tells his experiences at Marshmallows where he is a vicar. One of these experiences simply involves the effect which Nature has on him and a friend in the midst of an evening walk. During their walk, Walton tells his companion of a certain moment in his childhood when he felt that he had discovered the truth of Nature. His confession sounds much like Wordsworth's description of himself as a Nature-loving child in 'Tintern Abbey' (1798). Walton states:

I especially remember one summer day in my childhood, which has coloured all my ideas of summer and bliss and fulfilment of content. It is made up of only mossy grass, and the scent of the earth and wild flowers, and hot sun, and perfect sky—deep and blue, and traversed by blinding white clouds. I could not have been more than five or six, I think, from the kind of dress I wore, the very pearl buttons of which, encircled on their face with a ring of half-spherical hollows, have their undeniable relation in my memory to the heavens and the earth, to the march of the glorious clouds, and the tender scent of the rooted flowers; and, indeed, when I think of it, must, by the delight they gave me, have opened my mind the more to the enjoyment of the eternal paradise around me.

[...] No doubt there is something in the recollection of the associations of childhood to strengthen the power of nature upon us, but the power is in nature herself, else it would be but a poor weak thing to what it is. There *is* purity and state in that sky. There *is* a peace now in this wide still earth [...] and in that overhanging blue, which my heart cries out that it needs and cannot be well till it gains—gains in the truth, gains in God, who is the power of truth, the living and causing truth. There is indeed a rest that remaineth, a rest pictured out even here this night, to rouse my dull heart to desire it and follow after it, a rest that consists in thinking the thoughts of Him who is the Peace because the Unity, in being filled with that spirit which now pictures itself forth in this repose of the heavens and the earth.¹²⁰

Walton's confession brings the two men into a discussion on Wordsworth's poetry, specifically his *Ninth Evening Voluntary* (1820) and 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' (1807). With this example, MacDonald may have felt that he was standing alongside Wordsworth as one of the 'Prophets of Nature'.¹²¹

MacDonald develops Walton's veneration for Wordsworth in his earlier book, *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*. Like *The Seaboard Parish*, the novel contains several full-length sermons. During one episode in the novel, Walton reads a few of Wordsworth's ballads to his people, believing that the power of his poetry may inspire them to seek after higher things—namely God. Walton claims:

For I thought with myself, if I could get them to like poetry and beautiful things in words, it would not only do them good, but help them to see what is in the Bible, and therefore to love it more. For I never could believe that a man who did not find God in other places as well as in the Bible ever found Him there at all. And I always thought, that to find God in other books enabled us to see clearly that he was *more* in the Bible than in any other book, or all other books put together. (*Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*, Chapter X, 'My Christmas Party', 183)

¹²⁰ George MacDonald, *The Seaboard Parish* (London: Tinsley Bros., 1868; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2004), Chapter XXIV, 'At the Farm', pp. 311-3.

¹²¹ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book XIV, p. 588, line 444.

Additionally, Walton is working on a book that traces the ‘development of the love of Nature as shown in the earlier literature of the Jews and Greeks, through that of the Romans, Italians, and other nations, with the Anglo-Saxon for a fresh starting-point, into its latest forms in Gray, Thomson, Cowper, Crabbe, Wordsworth, Keats, and Tennyson’ (*Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*, Chapter XXXIV, ‘Tom’s Story’, 577). Walton’s book actually sounds quite interesting and it is a pity that MacDonald did not pursue it for himself. However, the following year, MacDonald published a similar book, *England’s Antiphon* (1868), which traces the development of religious verse in England, starting with sacred lyrics of the thirteenth century and ending with Tennyson.

Wordsworth writes in his ‘Preface’ to *The Excursion* (1814) that ‘a living Presence of the earth’ connects Man to Nature.¹²² This ‘Presence’, Wordsworth suggests, is ever before him on the physical landscape, but is transformed in his imagination as ‘Paradise, and groves | Elysian, Fortunate Fields—like those of old | Sought in the Atlantic Main’ (*The Excursion*, ‘Preface’, 590, lines 47-9). He believes that the ability to transform these sights is relatively simple:

For the discerning intellect of Man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day. (*The Excursion*, ‘Preface’, 590, lines 52-5)

He continues by proclaiming:

How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted:—and how exquisitely, too—
Theme this but little heard of among men—
The external World is fitted to the Mind [...]. (*The Excursion*, ‘Preface’, 590, lines 63-8)

¹²² William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, ‘Preface’ in *Poetical Works*, pp. 589-698, p. 590, line 42.

Wordsworth is writing that the mind of man is directly linked to world around him; the key to perceive this, however, lies in the ‘discerning intellect’. MacDonald may have responded to Wordsworth’s emphasis upon the word *discerning* and interpreted it as meaning *harmony*.

Though it is not always noticeable, we find intimations of this idea throughout Wordsworth’s poetry, especially in his *Ninth Evening Voluntary*: ‘Composed upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty’ (1820), which Walton, in *The Seaboard Parish*, claims to be ‘one of [Wordsworth’s] finest and truest and deepest poems’ (*The Seaboard Parish*, Chapter XXIV, ‘At the Farm’, 314). MacDonald discusses the poem in *England’s Antiphon*, which he published the same year as *The Seaboard Parish*, and suggests that Nature not only restored a sense of peace within Wordsworth, but that it also provided him with a deeper sense of wisdom.¹²³ Though MacDonald does not explicitly state that Wordsworth was knowingly writing about God, he is interpreting Wordsworth’s poem as a piece of literature that suggests God’s presence in Nature. In the poem, Wordsworth depicts a setting wherein:

No sound is uttered,—but a deep
And solemn harmony pervades
The hollow vale from steep to steep,
And penetrates the glades.¹²⁴

MacDonald discovered this idea in Wordsworth’s poetry and linked it to the imagination of God. At one point in *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*, Walton describes how Nature comforts him when he feels troubled. He claims:

Such comforts would come to us oftener from Nature, if we really believed that our God was the God of Nature; that when He made, or rather when He makes, He means; that not His hands only, but His heart too, is in the making of those things; that, therefore, the influences of Nature upon human minds and hearts are because He intended them. And if we believe that our God is everywhere, why should we not think Him present even in the coincidences that sometimes seem so strange? For, if He be in the things that coincide,

¹²³ George MacDonald, *England’s Antiphon* (London: Macmillan, 1868; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1996); cited as *EA*, Chapter XXI, ‘The New Vision’, p. 304.

¹²⁴ William Wordsworth, *Evening Voluntaries*, Part IX: ‘Composed upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty’ in *Poetical Works*, pp. 359-60, p. 359, lines 21-4.

He must be in the coincidence of those things. (*Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*, Chapter XXX, 'A Sermon to Myself', 516).

In 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey' (1798), Wordsworth has come to interpret Nature as 'a presence' that is inherent in both the physical world and 'in the mind of man' ('Tintern Abbey', 164, lines 94 and 99). Wordsworth writes that he has now learned to look upon Nature as:

A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. ('Tintern Abbey', 164, lines 100-4)

This idea is not only fundamental towards understanding Wordsworth's ideology, but it is also fundamental towards understanding MacDonald's philosophy regarding the interpretation of Nature. Although MacDonald was sympathetic towards science and scientific progression, he was, at the core, convinced by Wordsworth's claim that Nature and the mind of man were uniquely fitted to one another. Because of this, the physical effects of industrialism (as characterised negatively by the Condition-of-England novels in the 1840-50s) are noticeably absent from the pages of his novels (as was discussed in Chapter One). MacDonald is primarily concerned with the spiritual effects of man's separation from God and Nature.

Indeed, while Wordsworth was proclaiming his theme in the early nineteenth century, the mechanisations of science and industry began to flourish, suppressing the Romantic imagination. For example, Charles Darwin, in his youth, was a lover of art and music, as well as a great reader of poetry, devouring the works of Shakespeare, Milton, and the English Romantics; yet, in order to create for himself an environment where he felt free to think critically, he had to isolate himself from any religious or poetic influence.¹²⁵ Once divorced, the former emotions which the arts inspired in Darwin could never more be felt, leaving him to confess that his mind became 'a

¹²⁵ See *Charles Darwin: His Life Told in an Autobiographical Chapter, and in a Selected Series of His Published Letters*, ed. by Francis Darwin (London: John Murray, 1892), pp. 9-10 and 50-1.

kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts' (qtd in Francis Darwin, 51). Darwin was not proud of his confession, however, and, in an autobiographical statement, warns others who may follow in his wake. Darwin claims:

if I had to live my life again, I would have made a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once every week; for perhaps the parts of my brain now atrophied would thus have been kept active through use. The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature. (qtd in Francis Darwin, 51)

The two points which Darwin makes here are quite important. First, a sense of spiritual atrophy is possible with the prolonged neglect of imaginative activity. Second, happiness is dissolved. The 'discerning intellect' of which Wordsworth writes seeks *harmony* with Nature; the intellect of Darwin seeks *knowledge* of Nature. Such knowledge is of the 'thinking' mind, not the 'feeling' mind which Wordsworth promotes.

Another point worth mentioning here refers to John Stuart Mill's thoughts about Wordsworth. Like Darwin, the nature of Mill's studies affected his 'happiness' and emotional health. Assuming that a little diversion into literature could cure his depression, Mill began to read British Romantic poetry. He started with Byron, but, after finding Byron's melancholy too similar to his own, he turned to Wordsworth. Mill writes:

What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind, was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings, which I was in quest of. In them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings; which had no connexion [sic] with struggle or imperfection, but would be made richer by every improvement in the physical or social condition of mankind. From them I seemed to learn what would be the perennial sources of happiness, when all the greater evils of life shall have been removed. And I felt myself at once better and happier as I came under their influence.¹²⁶

While he never claimed that Wordsworth actually *saved his life*, Mill did suggest that Wordsworth's poetry played a crucial part towards aiding his mental health. After encountering

¹²⁶ John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1873), p. 148.

Wordsworth, Mill writes: ‘I gradually, but completely, emerged from my habitual depression, and was never again subject to it’ (149). What makes the accounts of both Darwin and Mill seem so interesting here is the emphasis they place on the need to feel *happiness*.

This is not to argue that the nineteenth-century scientific community shared Darwin’s fate. Wordsworth’s idealism continued to be reasserted through several major Victorian novelists. Years before Darwin’s confessional warning that neglecting the imagination results in the loss of a certain type of happiness, Dickens and MacDonald illustrated this predicament with certain characters. The most famous example of this in Dickens is summarised by Thomas Gradgrind’s dogma in *Hard Times* (1854), which cuts away anything from the imagination that does not point to a specific fact. In *A Christmas Carol* (1843), Ebenezer Scrooge, though not by any means a man of science, replaces his love of *Robinson Crusoe* with the facts and figures of the marketplace.

In MacDonald’s experimental novel, *Adela Cathcart* (1864), the title character is on the verge of succumbing to a similar state of emotional atrophy and requires the participation of a story-telling club to re-instil the *magic* of the fairy tale. Adela confesses her dilemma thus: ‘I woke suddenly one morning, [...] with an overpowering sense of blackness and misery. Everything I thought of seemed to have a core of wretchedness in it. I fought with the feeling as well as I could, and got to sleep again. But the effect of it did not leave me next [sic] day’.¹²⁷ With the recurrence of these feelings, Adela begins to fear that she had stumbled upon the truth of reality. This revelation disturbs her, causing everything around her to become ‘grey and dismal’ (*Adela Cathcart*, Volume I, Chapter II, ‘Church’, 25). Yet, as MacDonald would have

¹²⁷ George MacDonald, *Adela Cathcart*, (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1864; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2000), Volume I, Chapter II, ‘Church’, p. 25.

his readers see it, Adela's malady is not a psychological disorder: it is a spiritual disease. Adela continues to confess:

It was as if I had waked in the middle of some chaos over which God had never said: 'Let there be light.' [...] I began to see the bad in everything—wrong motives—and self-love—and pretence, and everything mean and low. [...] I wake wretched every morning. I am crowded with wretched, if not wicked thoughts, all day. Nothing seems worth anything. I don't care for anything. (*Adela Cathcart*, Volume I, Chapter II, 'Church', 25)

We see this spiritual disease replicated in the form of the 'Shadow' in *Phantastes* (1858) and *Lilith* (1895); but, unlike these books, *Adela Cathcart* is not a fantasy novel. In the case of this novel, MacDonald is presenting Adela's malady as the disease of the *commonplace* (the Victorian perception of ennui) and he appears to be suggesting the same lost sense of happiness that both Mill and Darwin confessed to have suffered.

Later in the story, John Smith, the novel's narrator, steps out one morning to observe the aftermath of a heavy snowfall. The scene is lovely and inspires Wordsworthian ideas in the narrator who muses: 'this is what has come of the chaos of falling flakes! To this repose of beauty has that storm settled and sunk! Will it not be so with our mental storms as well?' (*Adela Cathcart*, Volume III, Chapter II, 'The Giant's Heart', 312). His thoughts begin to mature and fall upon Adela's mystery and he realises that she is fast-succumbing to *commonplaceness*.

A comparable dilemma is more adequately suggested in *Guild Court*, published a few years later. In this novel (which we will discuss at length below), a child named Mattie, whose imaginative growth has been neglected and who has been isolated from Nature, suffers from mental and spiritual derangement. Her only salvation lies in the hands of Lucy Burton, a young social worker, who takes her out of the city where she reads to her poetry (Wordsworth's poetry, to be exact). Eventually, Mattie's 'happiness' is restored, revealing the power of both Nature and poetry (the interpretation of Nature) on her life.

There are other characters in MacDonald's novels that are not said to be suffering from this type of ennui; nevertheless, their inner and outer states of being are enhanced with Wordsworth's poetry. The most apparent example is shown with Margaret Elginbrod, the heroine in *David Elginbrod* (1863). In the novel, Margaret is tutored by a young man named Hugh Sutherland. Observing her mental alertness with poetry as well as her love for Nature, Hugh introduces her to Wordsworth's poetry. Later, both a physical and spiritual change comes upon Margaret as she begins to read Wordsworth, who teaches her to feel a deeper presence within Nature (*DE*, Chapter IX, 'Nature', 45). Describing this change, MacDonald writes:

Nature was doing for Margaret what she had done before for Wordsworth's Lucy: she was making of her 'a lady of her own.' She grew taller and more graceful. The lasting quiet of her face began to look as if it were ever upon the point of blossoming into an expression of lovely feeling. The principal change was in her mouth, which became delicate and tender in its curves, the lips seeming to kiss each other for very sweetness. (*DE*, Chapter IX, 'Nature', 46)

MacDonald's implication here is that Nature has the ability to alter Margaret and provide her with an almost sexual, Keatsian change that becomes exhibited as physical attractiveness. As well, MacDonald gives Nature-inspired headings (e.g. 'The Fir-Wood', 'The Daisy and the Primrose', 'Nature', etc.) for those chapters which depict Margaret's affinity with Nature.¹²⁸ Another character that is similar in this aspect to Margaret is Barbara Wylder in *There and Back* (1891). MacDonald writes that 'Nature was to her what she was to Wordsworth's Lucy, and made a lady of her own'.¹²⁹

If, in the end, MacDonald accepted Wordsworth's legacy as a 'Prophet of Nature', then he did so with the mission of revealing the god behind the foliage, on the mountain-top, or within the eyes of a child.

¹²⁸ See this correlation made in Deirdre Hayward, 'David Elginbrod and Jacob Boehme's *Aurora*', *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, 18 (1999), pp. 33-44, pp. 35-6.

¹²⁹ George MacDonald, *There and Back* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1891; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1998), Chapter XV, 'Barbara Wylder', p. 83.

Part Two

Finding God in Nature

The 'Veil' of Nature

The Victorians approached the concept of Nature with mixed feelings. At the beginning of the century, the objects of Nature (e.g. mountains, rivers, storms, etc.) were romanticised by the Romantic poets, who were, in their turn, influenced by the writings of Edmund Burke. By the middle of the century, men of science, such as Charles Darwin, Alfred Russell Wallace, and Charles Lyell, trekked across the globe and published *unromantic* views of Nature. What occurred with their work was a challenge to *unveil* Nature. The concept of Nature being veiled originates with Plutarch's essay 'On Isis and Osiris' where he reads an inscription at the temple of Isis (the goddess of Nature) in Sais: 'I am all that hath been, and is, and shall be; and my veil no mortal has hitherto raised'.

The allusion to the veiled Isis occurs throughout MacDonald's fiction. Most of these occurrences symbolise the thin shroud which separates man from God or eternity, such as the 'veil' which falls from Athanasia (Death) in Wilfrid Cumbermede's dream.¹³⁰ Yet, to fully understand MacDonald's ideas regarding the unveiling of Isis/Nature, we must turn to a discussion between two characters in *The Marquis of Lossie* (1877).

The novel is a direct sequel to *Malcolm* (1875), a Scottish novel which tells the story of Malcolm MacPhail, a young and highly intelligent fisherman who discovers that he is the lost heir of a great estate. In *The Marquis of Lossie*, Malcolm travels to London in order to aid his half-sister, Florimel. One of the novel's secondary characters is an artist named Lenorme who

¹³⁰ George MacDonald, *Wilfrid Cumbermede* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1872; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1997); cited as WC, Chapter XL, 'A Dream', pp. 340-1.

has attempted to capture Novalis's fairy tale at the moment when Isis/Rosebud unveils herself before Hyacinth. His attempt to locate what he feels would be the ideal model to pose for Isis has been unsuccessful—until he meets Florimel. She poses as the goddess and Lenorme commences work on his painting. One day, as Malcolm visits Lenorme's studio, he notices the painting and recognises Florimel as the depicted goddess. Malcolm believes it best that Florimel not be in the painting and, whilst suggesting a creative way to state his opinion, he makes a significant point regarding the veil's *meaning*. Discussing the idea of revelation and mystery, Malcolm claims: 'The Isis for ever veiled is the absolutely Unknown, not the Mysterious'.¹³¹ Since the 'Unknown' can never be fully revealed, Malcolm suggests that Lenorme incorporate an element of mystery to his work by re-*veiling* instead of revealing Isis.

But Malcolm's suggestion does not end with the painting's need for mystery; he turns his discussion upon that which makes one worthy to approach the veiled goddess. Malcolm uses the words 'clean' and 'pure' to suggest worthiness (*ML*, Chapter XXVIII, 'The Portrait', 120). Using Malcolm's opinion that the goddess requires 'purity', MacDonald suggests that only certain individuals in his society (or any society) are truly capable of approaching and lifting the veil of Nature. This is an esoteric concept of MacDonald's, informing us of his belief that the spiritual truth of Nature will never be fully revealed. Science, MacDonald would presume, may grasp particular facts about Nature, but it could never fully uncover its true meaning.

Like many Victorians, MacDonald needed always to believe that there was meaning in life, that everything was somehow connected and harmonised within God, and felt that only the true believer (or follower) of Christ could interpret Nature's mysteries as being managed by God. We find a good example of this in *St. George and St. Michael* (1876). Following the death of a

¹³¹ George MacDonald, *The Marquis of Lossie* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1877; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2004); cited as *ML*, Chapter XXVIII, 'The Portrait', p. 117.

young child at Raglan Castle, the Marquis of Worcester seeks solitude in order to mourn. During his time in solitude, a storm begins to rage over the castle. The scene is reminiscent of *King Lear* as MacDonald writes that for the Marquis ‘the storm came as a relief to his overcharged spirit’ (*SGSM*, Chapter XXI, ‘The Damsel which Fell Sick’, 166). MacDonald, as the novel’s narrator, questions the nineteenth-century scientific response when he illustrates how the storm’s wind soothed the Marquis:

Oxygen, ozone, nitrogen, water, carbonic acid, is it? Doubtless—and other things, perhaps, which chemistry cannot detect. Nevertheless, give its parts what names you will, its whole is yet the wind of the living God to the bodies of men, His spirit to their spirits, His breath to their hearts. When I learn that there is no primal intent—only chance—in the unspeakable joy that it gives, I shall cease to believe in poetry, in music, in woman, in God. Nay, I must have already ceased to believe in God ere I could believe that the wind that bloweth where it listeth is free because God hath forgotten it, and that it bears from Him no message to me. (*SGSM*, Chapter XXI, ‘The Damsel which Fell Sick’, 166-7)

A similar idea is expressed in *Castle Warlock* (1882). The novel opens with the young hero, Cosmo, in a Wordsworthian state of solitude. Sitting meditatively, watching the flowing motion of a fountain spring, Cosmo considers its origins. Cosmo’s intellect is capable of marrying scientific and poetic thought. Whilst the young hero gazes at the spring, MacDonald writes:

The poetic nature was not merely predominant in him, but dominant, sending itself a pervading spirit through the science that else would have stifled him. For there is nothing in the outer fact by which man can live, any more than by bread; it needs the poetic eye, illuminating with polarized ray as it pierces, to reveal in the heart of fact its life, that is, its eternal relations.¹³²

With these examples, MacDonald issues a challenge to the scientific approach of Nature. Though he does not dispute the revelation of Nature’s facts under a microscope, he does, however, feel that only an eye which has been spiritually adjusted to seek God may truly interpret the mysteries of Nature.

¹³² George MacDonald, *Castle Warlock* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1882; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1998), Chapter I, ‘Castle Warlock’, p. 5.

Regardless, the lifting of Nature's veil was attempted by scientific enquiry. Although the Victorians may have wished to hold on to Wordsworth's view of Nature, the progress of science was much too strong. MacDonald was aware of this opposition and wrote:

For at the entrance of Science, nobly and gracefully as she bears herself, young Poetry shrinks back startled, dismayed. Poetry is true as Science, and Science is holy as Poetry; but young Poetry is timid and Science is fearless, and bears with her a colder atmosphere than the other has yet learned to brave. (*Orts*, 'A Sketch of Individual Development', 51)

Yet even in the mid-nineteenth century, Nature's *face* had begun to reveal as many expressions as those that were illustrated in Darwin's *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872). For many Victorians, the idea that Nature reveals 'God's face' began to appear rather doubtful.

In the end, the simple act of *writing* about Nature depended largely on the goal of the writer: either Nature was to be portrayed as a living organism—something to be collected and studied or else Nature was a spiritual book—something to reveal spiritual meaning and purpose regarding man's place in the world. For instance, as Darwin was cataloguing natural facts taken from his specimens on board the *HMS Beagle*, Emerson was philosophising that 'Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact'.¹³³

U.C. Knoepfelmacher suggests that although Victorian science attacked the spiritual significance of Nature, Victorian poets, painters, and architects held on to its mystery.¹³⁴ According to G. Robert Stange, it was this division which separated the Victorian poets and artists from the Victorian novelists. The period's poets, Stange suggests, had difficulty finding

¹³³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Nature' (1844) in *Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 14 vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1883), I, p. 32. For further discussion regarding Nature and its shared influences between British and American Romantic writers, see Van Wyck Brooks, *The Flowering of New England, 1815-1865*, rev. edn (n.p.: E.P. Dutton, 1937).

¹³⁴ U.C. Knoepfelmacher, 'Introduction' in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. by U.C. Knoepfelmacher and G.B. Tennyson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1977), pp. xvii-xxiii, p. xxi.

inspiration in the metropolis; as a result, the subject of the metropolis was largely avoided. This was not so with the novelists who found the city a more successful subject.¹³⁵

If we look closely, we find similar dichotomies present in MacDonald's fiction; after all, we must remember that he spent his entire adulthood in various urban settings. Additionally, he shared his century's fervour towards scientific discovery and often represented Nature as a potentially furious and deadly force for those who chose to remain in the country. For instance, the nameless hero in the poem, 'A Hidden Life' (1857), whilst helping his community take in the annual harvest, catches a violent fever during a thunderstorm. This, in consequence, weakens his body and leads him to an early death. Nature's fury is also represented with numerous accounts in the novels. Life-threatening snowstorms take place in *David Elginbrod* (1863) and *Heather and Snow* (1893). In fact, such a storm is responsible for Stephen Barclay's ('Dog-Steenie') demise in the latter novel. Deadly floods appear in *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (1865), *Sir Gibbie* (1879), *Paul Faber, Surgeon* (1879), and *What's Mine's Mine* (1886). An earthquake occurs in *A Rough Shaking* (1890), killing the mother of the young hero, Clare Skymer, and separating him from his father.

Growing up in the rural northeast corner of Scotland, famed for its bleak winters, MacDonald must have endured several dangerous snowstorms. Floods were also a common occurrence. In reference to the flood in *Sir Gibbie*, MacDonald footnotes Thomas Dick Lauder's *Account of the Morayshire Floods in 1829* (1830), claiming it as 'an enchanting book, especially to one whose earliest memories are interwoven with water floods'.¹³⁶ The flood of 1829 was

¹³⁵ G. Robert Stange, 'The Frightened Poets' in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, 2 vols., ed. by H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), II, pp. 475-94. Stange suggests that the Victorian poets did not begin to gain inspiration from London until the Aesthetic Movement began in the 1890s, pp. 490-3.

¹³⁶ George MacDonald, *Sir Gibbie* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1879; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2000), Chapter XXXVI, 'The Brander', p. 267. The complete reference is Thomas Dick Lauder, *An Account of the Great Floods of August, 1829, in the Province of Moray and Adjoining Districts* (Edinburgh: Adam Black, 1830).

peculiarly vast and destructive, hence the book about it. MacDonald even endured an earthquake in 1887 during his residence in Bordighera, Italy.¹³⁷ However, catastrophes in Nature are not really all that they seem to be in MacDonald's fiction. Whenever there is a scene of natural violence, some sort of spiritual good seems to flourish in its wake. Cosmo's father, in *Castle Warlock*, illustrates this idea when he claims: 'It's whiles i' the storm, whiles i' the desert, whiles i' the agony, an' whiles i' the calm, whaurever he gets them richt their lanes, 'at the Lord veesits his ain—in person, as a body micht say' (*Castle Warlock*, Chapter LII, 'A Rest', 300). Perhaps the greatest example of God interacting with his creation via catastrophe comes with the well-known episode of North Wind sinking a ship full of passengers at sea during a violent storm in *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871, Chapter VII, 'The Cathedral').

This philosophical attitude regarding Nature is what typically sets MacDonald apart from other Victorian novelists. The idea that Nature could be interpreted as both the 'face' and 'arms' of God with which the world was upheld was a comfort to MacDonald, and though scientific discoveries revealed a world apart from God, his faith did not appear to show signs of intimidation. Furthermore, MacDonald was sympathetic to science and often allegorised geological wonders as well as the theories of natural selection and evolution in his fiction.

Interestingly, MacDonald never created a scientific character; doctors, craftsmen, artists, and clergymen abound—but in no work do we find an indisputable man of science. The rational doctor and title character from *Paul Faber, Surgeon* comes fairly close to reaching this mark; but, despite his objective approach to the pursuit of science, he possesses a few Romantic qualities and opposes certain *acts* of science (i.e. vivisection), even at the cost of failing to obtain and revealing Nature's deepest secrets. One other character, Herr von Funkelstein, the villainous mesmerist in *David Elginbrod*, gives the appearance of being a man of science; but his 'science'

¹³⁷ See *GMDW*, pp. 513-5.

is merely animal magnetism—which distorts the laws of Nature rather than locating and revealing objective truth. Funkelstein’s presence in MacDonald’s fiction is an intriguing subject and coincides with the discussion of Nature in this book and the Supernatural in Victorian literature. The subject of animal magnetism and the distortion of Nature were popular literary subjects throughout the nineteenth century and are especially relevant to today’s discussion of the Victorian Gothic novel.¹³⁸

Indeed, MacDonald was sympathetic towards science, but he was too much of a Romantic to not see that there was some spiritual meaning in Nature. Like Wordsworth, MacDonald believed that there is an underlying spirit residing within Nature that is intrinsically connected to all things. MacDonald went a little further by labelling it *God*—whose ways could sometimes be expressed through poetry; science, he felt, could do nothing but fail to fully express the ways of God.

Pantheism in *What’s Mine’s Mine*

MacDonald was not a pantheist in the traditional sense of the term, but what we find in MacDonald’s spiritual philosophy is a type of pantheism—much akin to the ‘Christian pantheism’ which he attributes to Wordsworth (*Orts*, ‘Wordsworth’s Poetry’, 245). MacDonald, believing that everything is a product of God, proposes that all things reveal God. This can only be done when viewed correctly (meaning with a divinely-inspired imagination). Furthermore, MacDonald criticises the theological concept of God as a maker and argues, instead, that God is a thinker. Whatever God thinks, according to MacDonald, becomes the world’s reality.

¹³⁸ For an adequate discussion of animal magnetism and MacDonald’s interests in chemistry, see David S. Robb’s ‘George MacDonald and Animal Magnetism’, *VII: An Anglo-American Literary Review*, 8 (1987), pp. 9-24.

When we analyse Nature in MacDonald's fiction, we must understand that he is presenting it as if it was a symbol that represents truths about God. MacDonald discusses this idea in *England's Antiphon* (1868) whilst describing the meaning of literary symbolism: '*light for good, darkness for evil*. Such symbols are the true bodies of the true ideas' (EA, Chapter XVI, 'Henry More and Richard Baxter', 232). This is not allegory. For MacDonald, such symbols point towards or awaken one's thoughts to God. MacDonald writes: 'For this service mainly what we term *nature* was called into being, namely, to furnish forms for truths, for without form truth cannot be uttered' (EA, Chapter XVI, 'Henry More and Richard Baxter', 232). Everything that occurs in MacDonald's novels has a specific reason which points to a spiritual source. MacDonald's idea of pantheism is this: Nature is an unvarying revelation of God.

MacDonald felt a continual need to defend his idea of Christian pantheism. He does so in most, if not all, of his novels. Yet, his best attempt at defining and defending Christian pantheism is made in his essay, 'Wordsworth's Poetry' (1893). He begins his claim with the declaration that God did not create human life *ex nihilo* nor did he create human life with his hands; instead, all life was born out of his own heart (Orts, 'Wordsworth's Poetry', 246). This idea is one of the major pillars of MacDonald's theology and understanding this philosophy is crucial to interpreting anything he wrote. MacDonald explains this theory thus:

The poets of the Old Testament speak of everything as being the work of God's hand:—We are the 'work of his hand;' 'The world was made by him.' But in the New Testament there is a higher form used to express the relation in which we stand to him—'We are his offspring;' not the work of his hand, but the children that came forth from his heart. (Orts, 'Wordsworth's Poetry', 245-6)

Dividing the concept of how God was seen between the Old and New Testaments, MacDonald is suggesting that there is always a better way to see and/or approach God in the present. Here, MacDonald applies this theory to Nature as he writes: 'This world is not merely a thing which

God hath made, subjecting it to laws; but it is an expression of the thought, the feeling, the heart of God himself" (*Orts*, 'Wordsworth's Poetry', 246). It is MacDonald's idea, therefore, that Nature serves as a mediator between God and his creation.

As is testified in a letter written to his future wife, it is clear that MacDonald developed his idea of Christian pantheism early in life. In his letter, MacDonald asks Louisa to tell him of her perceptions about the natural world and the deeper, spiritual world within. MacDonald writes:

Tell me again about everything round about you; every expression the beautiful face of Nature puts on. Tell me, too, about the world within your own soul—that living world—without which the world without would be but a lifelessness. The beautiful things round about you are the expression of God's face, or, as in Faust, the garment whereby we see the deity. Is God's sun more beautiful than God himself? Has he not left it to us as a symbol of his own life-giving light? ('Letter to Louisa Powell, 12 May 1849', in Sadler, 27-8)

In contrast with the idea of reading Nature as a book, MacDonald suggests in his letter that Nature is better interpreted as a garment worn by God.

MacDonald challenges other conventional concepts, such as the traditional depiction of God as an engineer; he claims, instead, that his readers would do better by understanding God as an artist (*Orts*, 'Wordsworth's Poetry', 246). As can be seen in the letter to his wife, MacDonald was dissatisfied with thinking of God as a mechanical engineer and wished, instead, to think of him as an artist who uses beauty to reflect the ideals of his heart. Calling God the 'first of all artists', MacDonald argues:

he has put beauty into nature, knowing how it will affect us, and intending that it should so affect us; that he has embodied his own grand thoughts thus that we might see them and be glad. [...] whatever we feel in the highest moments of truth shining through beauty, whatever comes to our souls as a power of life, is meant to be seen and felt by us, and to be regarded not as the work of his hand, but as the flowing forth of his heart, the flowing forth of his love of us, making us blessed in the union of his heart and ours. (*Orts*, 'Wordsworth's Poetry', 246-7)

It is primarily with this 'union' that MacDonald's idea of Christian pantheism is formed. Nature, for him, is not only a revelation of God, but it has the ability to inspire man to formulate and seek out his ideals.

MacDonald illustrates this aspect of Nature in his novels where his 'hero' characters are often first inspired by Nature to seek after a greater ideal, which they soon discover to be rooted in Christ. This, then, brings them to love and serve their fellow man, ever working towards spiritual growth. Thus, Nature, composing the outward features of God, serves mankind by awakening things that are already within him, though these things may be hidden and perhaps long forgotten due to societal influences of the commonplace (*Orts*, 'The Fantastic Imagination', 319). As was discussed in Part Three of the previous chapter (though in the context of Victorian social reform), what is sometimes reawakened within these characters is the need to experience beauty, which aids the re-emergence of their true child-like natures and enables spiritual progression towards God.

The idea is further explained in *What's Mine's Mine* (1886), a later Scottish novel set in the Highlands. Unlike his earlier Scottish novels (*David Elginbrod*, *Alec Forbes of Howglen*, *Malcolm*, etc.), *What's Mine's Mine* is unique in that there is no usage of Broad Scots. The story tells of the Clan Macruadh, an ancient clan in the Highlands, which has begun to deteriorate. Most of their land has been purchased by Peregrine Palmer, a brewer who has made his way in the world and has a design for turning the Macruadh farmland into a private hunting ground. The novel's heroes consist of Alister (the clan's chieftain) and his brother, Ian. The novel's plot deals with Alister's coming to realise that he must relinquish his land and lead his clan to a new life in Canada. Throughout the novel, the relationship between Nature and the various characters

(especially Ian and Alister) is intrinsically tied. We find in the aptly-named chapter, 'Nature' (Chapter XXIX), that MacDonald reveals that this bond is of a spiritual nature.

The chapter begins with Ian and Alister taking an evening walk with Peregrine's daughters, Christina and Mercy. Ian, who had been walking silently, suddenly looked up at the mountainous landscape before them and 'spread out his arms toward the starry vault'.¹³⁹ Mercy observes this action and is troubled. Having recently read an article attacking the theory of pantheism, she interprets Ian's behaviour as a likely sign that he is a pantheist. However, she is prudent enough to make an attempt to gather more proof before she is convinced. Thus, she questions the two brothers regarding previous discussions they had together about Nature and asks for their definition of Nature's terminology. Ian's response resembles Blake: 'We mean by *nature* every visitation of the outside world through our senses' (*WMM*, Chapter XXIX, 'Nature', 211). He continues by suggesting that our sensory perceptions are spiritually influenced. Ian claims:

We mean the things themselves only for the sake of what they say to us. As our sense of smell brings us news of fields far off, so those fields, or even the smell only that comes from them, tell us of things, meanings, thoughts, intentions beyond them, and embodied in them. (*WMM*, Chapter XXIX, 'Nature', 211)

These influences, according to Ian, come directly from God. In an indirect way, Ian suggests that once a man registers the idea that his environment *is* God, then he is no longer oppressed with feelings of worldly imprisonment. Ian claims that without God, the world would have unfathomable limitations. MacDonald's argument is precisely this: the human soul is liberated when Nature is viewed as the space of God.

We find similar ideas about the freed soul throughout MacDonald's poetry and fiction. Oftentimes, MacDonald illustrates his idea using the story of Psyche and Eros. One of the

¹³⁹ George MacDonald, *What's Mine's Mine* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1886; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2000); cited as *WMM*, Chapter XXIX, 'Nature', p. 210.

loveliest of these expressions is found in *St. George and St. Michael* when MacDonald uses the simile of Psyche's metamorphosis to illustrate the liberty Dorothy Vaughan feels after she has been cleared of a crime that she did not commit. The feelings of relief come to her as she gallops at full speed on the back of her horse. MacDonald writes: 'She felt as the freed Psyche must feel when she drops the clay, and lo! the whole chrysalid world, which has hitherto hung as a clog at her foot, fast by the inexorable chain our blindness calls gravitation, has dropped from her with the clay, and the universe is her own' (*SGSM*, Chapter XXXVI, 'The Discovery', 256). Freedom and unlimited space, for MacDonald, is the realm of God; the *self*, when separated from the will of God, is imprisonment.

To illustrate his point further, Ian draws his friends' attention to the starry sky above, asking them to reflect on its state of perfectness. He claims:

I do not say it is put there for the purpose of representing God; I say it is there of necessity, because of its nature, and its nature is its relation to God. It is of God's thinking; and that half-sphere above men's heads, with influence endlessly beyond the reach of their consciousness, is the beginning of all revelation of him to men. They must begin with that. It is the simplest as well as the most external likeness of him, while its relation to him goes so deep that it represents things in his very nature that nothing else could. (*WMM*, Chapter XXIX, 'Nature', 214)

The point of Ian's analogy is to suggest the idea that as one looks *into* the infinitude of space, one observes the reflection of God. Ian argues that of all the objects in Nature, space is the 'only figure, image, emblem, symbol, fit to begin us to know God; it is an idea incomprehensible; we can only believe in it' (*WMM*, Chapter XXIX, 'Nature', 214).

During the brief conversation which follows Ian's theory, Mercy requests that the brothers begin to instruct her. Alister utters the phrase: 'the temple of nature'—which Mercy misinterprets and accuses them of being pantheists (*WMM*, Chapter XXIX, 'Nature', 215). Ian responds to Mercy, agreeing that he and his brother are pantheists due to their belief 'that not a lily can grow, not a sparrow fall [sic] to the ground without [their] Father'; but argues that

worship in the temple of Nature does not mean that they worship Nature, but that they worship God whilst in Nature (*WMM*, Chapter XXIX, 'Nature', 215). Though MacDonald does not point directly to Wordsworth's sonnet, 'It is a Beauteous Evening, Calm and Free' (1807), it is clear that he is making an allusion to its meaning. In the sonnet, Wordsworth describes the powerful effects which Nature has on his feelings. He notices that his young daughter, who is with him at the moment, is unaffected by the same force of Nature which he so strongly feels and concludes that she, being a child, is already in harmony with Nature. Wordsworth writes:

If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,
Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not.¹⁴⁰

By claiming his daughter as a regular occupant of 'Nature's Temple', Wordsworth argues that she does not need to seek out the truth—she has already found it.

Convinced that Ian and Alister are not pantheists, at least in the traditional sense, Mercy renews her plea for the brothers' guidance. Ian proposes that she simply seek solitude in Nature. His instructions appear simple at first glance, but are actually quite significant. First, she is told to wait until the 'weather is fine'; then, ensuring that she has left all books behind, she must set out alone. With this first set of instructions, Ian is guiding Mercy to follow Wordsworth's appeal to put away all books and to bond, instead, with Nature, as suggested in 'Expostulation and Reply' (1798), 'The Tables Turned' (1798), and 'Lines Written at a Short Distance from My House' (1798). Like 'Tintern Abbey', these are some of Wordsworth's most significant poems on the power of Nature and express his views on how a young and developing mind ought to best be educated.

¹⁴⁰ William Wordsworth, 'It is a Beauteous Evening, Calm and Free' in *Poetical Works*, p. 205, lines 10-4.

One of the consistent ideas expressed in these poems is that books can disable a person who may wish to learn from Nature. Wordsworth seems to be suggesting that he is not concerned with what man teaches man but what Nature teaches man. In 'The Tables Turned', Wordsworth claims:

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:—
We murder to dissect.

Enough of Science and of Art;
Close up those barren leaves;
Come forth and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.¹⁴¹

The 'One impulse' of which Wordsworth speaks is echoed in 'Lines Written at a Short Distance from My House':

One moment now may give us more
Than years of toiling reason:
Our minds shall drink at every pore
The spirit of the season.

Some silent laws our hearts will make,
Which they shall long obey:
We for the year to come may take
Our temper from to-day.

And from the blessed power that rolls
About, below, above,
We'll frame the measure of our souls:
They shall be tuned to love.¹⁴²

Twice, in the poem, the speaker invites his sister to join him in the woods and discourages her from bringing any books (lines 15 and 39). Thus, it comes as no surprise in *What's Mine's Mine*

¹⁴¹ William Wordsworth, 'The Tables Turned' in *Poetical Works*, p. 377, lines 21-32.

¹⁴² William Wordsworth, 'Lines Written at a Short Distance from My House' ('To My Sister') in *Poetical Works*, p. 387, lines 25-36.

that Ian encourages Mercy to leave her books behind and enter Nature with an open heart ‘That watches and receives’. Ian is simply following Wordsworth’s encouragement.

MacDonald also represents Wordsworth’s idea in *Robert Falconer*. He describes how, one day, the young hero is reclining in Nature. During this episode, MacDonald makes a point to show that his character has no book in hand. MacDonald writes:

Had Robert possessed a copy of *Robinson Crusoe*, or had his grandmother not cast *The Lady of the Lake*, mistaking it for an idol, [...] he might have been lying reading it, blind and deaf to the face and the voice of Nature, and years might have passed before a response awoke in his heart. It is good that children of faculty, as distinguished from capacity, should not have too many books to read, or too much of early lessoning. The increase of examinations in our country will increase its capacity and diminish its faculty. We shall have more compilers and reducers and fewer thinkers; more modifiers and completers, and fewer inventors. (*RF*, Part I, Chapter XVIII, ‘Nature Puts in a Claim’, 153-4)

Writing this, MacDonald not only points to Wordsworth’s idea, but challenges the then current educational system and suggests that the lack of Nature is a detriment to the growing intellect.

Following this, MacDonald offers an additional interpretation of Wordsworth’s idea by suggesting that what the growing intellect discovers in Nature is God. Nature awakens the need in his young hero to seek God. The episode is quite intense and deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

[Robert] lay gazing up into the depth of the sky, rendered deeper and bluer by the masses of white cloud that hung almost motionless below it, until he felt a kind of bodily fear lest he should fall off the face of the round earth into the abyss. A gentle wind, laden with pine odours from the sun-heated trees behind him, flapped its light wing in his face: the humanity of the world smote his heart; the great sky towered up over him, and its divinity entered his soul; a strange longing after something 'he knew not nor could name' awoke within him, followed by the pang of a sudden fear that there was no such thing as that which he sought, that it was all a fancy of his own spirit; [...] the feeling was never stilled; the desire never left him; sometimes growing even to a passion that was relieved only by a flood of tears.

Strange as it may sound to those who have never thought of such things save in connection with Sundays and Bibles and churches and sermons, that which was now working in Falconer's mind was the first dull and faint movement of the greatest need that the human heart possesses—the need of the God-Man. There must be truth in the scent of that pine-wood: some one must mean it. There must be a glory in those heavens that depends not upon our imagination: some power greater than they must dwell in them. Some spirit must move in that wind that haunts us with a kind of human sorrow; some

soul must look up to us from the eye of that starry flower. It must be something human, else not to us divine.

Little did Robert think that such was his need—that his soul was searching after One whose form was constantly presented to him, but as constantly obscured and made unlovely by the words without knowledge spoken in the religious assemblies of the land; that he was longing without knowing it on the Saturday for that from which on the Sunday he would be repelled without knowing it. Years passed before he drew nigh to the knowledge of what he sought.

For weeks the mood broken by the voice of his companion did not return, though the forms of Nature were henceforth full of a pleasure he had never known before. He loved the grass; the water was more gracious to him; he would leave his bed early, that he might gaze on the clouds of the east, with their borders gold-blasted with sunrise; he would linger in the fields that the amber and purple, and green and red, of the sunset, might not escape after the sun unseen. And as long as he felt the mystery, the revelation of the mystery lay before and not behind him. (*RF*, Part I, Chapter XVIII, 'Nature Puts in a Claim', 154-5)

This passage has also been given in its entirety to show that without the references to God, it could easily be taken for one written by Wordsworth. In the end, MacDonald believed that Nature's highest gift to humanity was its ability to awaken something within man which causes him to think of God. In his essay, 'Wordsworth's Poetry', MacDonald writes:

There is yet a higher and more sustained influence exercised by nature, and that takes effect when she puts a man into that mood or condition in which thoughts come of themselves. That is perhaps the best thing that can be done for us, the best at least that nature can do. It is certainly higher than mere intellectual teaching. (*Orts*, 'Wordsworth's Poetry', 254)

This idea is also echoed in his essay, 'The Fantastic Imagination', where he writes: 'The best Nature does for us is to work in us such moods in which thoughts of high import arise'; thus, 'Nature is mood-engendering, thought-provoking' (*Orts*, 'The Fantastic Imagination', 319-20).

Likewise, Hugh Sutherland, the protagonist in *David Elginbrod*, does not come to a full understanding of Nature's truths until the end of the book, after his maturation. Although he is well acquainted with the writings of Wordsworth and Coleridge, he has never really entered Nature before. He knows it only from books. After his maturation, he genuinely comes to see Nature as Wordsworth presents it, and is thus changed by it. MacDonald writes:

But now she herself appeared to him,—the grand, pure, tender mother, ancient in years, yet ever young; appeared to him, not in the mirror of a man's words, but bending over

him from the fathomless bosom of the sky, from the outspread arms of the forest-trees, from the silent judgment of the everlasting hills. She spoke to him from the depths of air, from the winds that harp upon the boughs, and trumpet upon the great caverns, and from the streams that sing as they go to be lost in rest. She would have shone upon him out of the eyes of her infants, the flowers, but they had their faces turned to her breast now, hiding from the pale blue eyes and the freezing breath of old Winter, who was looking for them with his face bent close to their refuge. And he felt that she had a power to heal and to instruct; yea, that she was a power of life, and could speak to the heart and conscience mighty words about God and Truth and Love. (*DE*, Chapter LXX, 'Nature and Her Lady', 448)

MacDonald is representing the change in how Hugh responds to Nature that Wordsworth describes in 'Tintern Abbey':

For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; [...]
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. ('Tintern Abbey', 164, lines 88-102)

In MacDonald's illustration, Nature does more than 'chasten and subdue': it becomes, for Hugh, a revelation of 'God and Truth and Love'. MacDonald adds:

He beheld in the great All the expression of the thoughts and feelings of the Maker of the heavens and the earth and the sea and the fountains of water. The powers of the world to come, that is, the world of unseen truth and ideal reality, were upon him in the presence of the world that now is. For the first time in his life, he felt at home with nature. (*DE*, Chapter LXX, 'Nature and Her Lady', 449)

The 'world of unseen truth and ideal reality', which Nature reveals to Hugh, suggests MacDonald's belief that the physical world is intrinsically connected to, and responds to, the spiritual world.

In his essay, 'Wordsworth's Poetry', MacDonald quotes the lines given above from 'Tintern Abbey' and offers his own interpretation of what Wordsworth was trying to say. MacDonald writes: 'Wordsworth wished to give to man what he found in nature. It was to him a

power of good, a world of teaching, a strength of life' (*Orts*, 'Wordsworth's Poetry', 250).

Though Wordsworth does not describe in his poem what he finds as being God, necessarily,

MacDonald appears to interpret it as being so. He argues earlier that Wordsworth:

saw God present everywhere; not always immediately, in his own form, it is true; but whether he looked upon the awful mountain-peak, sky-encompassed with loveliness, or upon the face of a little child, which is as it were eyes in the face of nature—in all things he felt the solemn presence of the Divine Spirit'. (*Orts*, 'Wordsworth's Poetry', 247)

MacDonald adds later that Wordsworth was only able to see and feel such a *presence* in Nature because he believed it existed as 'something that was more definite and helpful to him' (*Orts*, 'Wordsworth's Poetry', 256). With this, MacDonald claims: 'When we understand the Word of God, then we understand the works of God; when we know the nature of an artist, we know his pictures; when we have known and talked with the poet, we understand his poetry far better. To the man of God, all nature will be but changeful reflections of the face of God' (*Orts*, 'Wordsworth's Poetry' 256). Yet, MacDonald never met or even corresponded with Wordsworth. Instead, believing that he, himself, was a genuine 'man of God', MacDonald felt at liberty to interpret and defend Wordsworth's poetry as lessons that point towards God. He saw Wordsworth as 'Nature's High Priest', who passively retreated into Nature and was alone with God.

This brings us to the second instruction that Ian gives to Mercy in *What's Mine's Mine*. After encouraging her to wait for a fine day, and telling her to leave all books behind, Ian instructs her to climb to the top of a hill and to 'just be still' (*WMM*, Chapter XXIX, 'Nature', 220). He is proposing two significant ideas with this suggestion. First, it is crucial that Mercy locates a place that is physically high. Hills and mountains make for sacred places in MacDonald's fiction and are often depicted as meeting grounds between man and God (as will be discussed shortly). Therefore, it is no coincidence that Mercy is instructed to do just this.

Second, Mercy is told to be still. The origin of this idea is clearly biblical: ‘Be still, and know that I am God’ (Psalm 46.10). ‘By and by,’ Ian claims, ‘it may be, you will begin to know something of Nature’ (*WMM*, Chapter XXIX, ‘Nature’, 220). Mercy is not promised that she will feel anything; yet, Ian’s emphasis rests on the act that she must first go to Nature and ‘be still’.

Ian’s grand scheme for Mercy is that, by spending time in Nature, she will grow familiar with its laws and will, perhaps, come to see God revealed in them. MacDonald discusses this idea a few years later in his sermon, ‘The Truth’ (1889), where he argues that a person can come closer to understanding God by simply observing the laws of Nature. MacDonald begins his argument by defining and dividing *fact* from *truth*. To illustrate his idea, MacDonald suggests that a bucket of water left outside on a day with freezing temperatures would freeze—this he claims to be a natural fact. However, he argues that the fact in and of itself, without suggesting what it means, does nothing to reveal its truth. MacDonald writes:

It cannot be to us a truth until we descry the reason of its existence, its relation to mind and intent, yea to self-existence. Tell us why it *must* be so, and you state a truth. When we come to see that a law is such, because it is the embodiment of a certain eternal thought, beheld by us in it, a fact of the being of God, the facts of which alone are truths, then indeed it will be to us, not a law merely, but an embodied truth.¹⁴³

The ‘embodied truth’, for MacDonald, is God. He claims:

I believe that every fact in nature is a revelation of God, is there such as it is because God is such as he is; and I suspect that all its facts impress us so that we learn God unconsciously. True, we cannot think of any one fact thus, except as we find the soul of it—its fact of God; but from the moment when first we come into contact with the world, it is to us a revelation of God, his things seen, by which we come to know the things unseen. (*US3*, ‘The Truth’, 463)

This, for MacDonald, is the difference between the facts of Nature and its truths.

Indeed, there is an ideological strain of pantheism running through MacDonald’s theology and it is important to remember that he does not suggest that God is Nature, but that God is revealed by Nature. While Wordsworth is suggesting in these poems that spending time in

¹⁴³ George MacDonald, ‘The Truth’ in *US3*, pp. 459-79, p. 462.

Nature (without books) can develop a growing mind and help to improve a person's outlook on life, MacDonald is suggesting that God can be revealed and perhaps understood. Believing that everything, including hell, is contained within the state of God, MacDonald formulates a theory of reality as that which is simply the product of God's imagination.

'Divine Air' and 'God's Steeples' in 'A Journey Rejourneyed' and *Wilfrid Cumbermede*

Although we can only know little, if anything, of MacDonald's childhood experiences in the Scottish Highlands, we do know that his reading of Romantic poetry made an impression on his general view of the mountains. Indeed, mountains and mountain imagery were conventional symbols evoked by the British Romantics. In his poem 'Hymn: Before Sunrise, in the Vale of Chamouni' (1802), Samuel Taylor Coleridge suggests that Nature (Mont Blanc, in this case) can be a liaison between man and God.¹⁴⁴ Interestingly, Coleridge was not actually looking at Mont Blanc, at least not in a physical sense, when he constructed this poem. For him, the meaning or truth behind the mountain was simply conjured up by his imagination. It is little wonder then that MacDonald held Coleridge's vision in high regard, claiming that the poem is 'Perhaps the grandest hymn of praise which man, the mouth-piece of Nature, utters for her' (*EA*, Chapter XXI, 'The New Vision', 307-8). The most famous example of the mountain in Romantic poetry is found with Shelley's 'Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni' (1817). In his poem, Shelley proclaims the influential power of the mountain (i.e. Nature) over the human imagination.¹⁴⁵ Yet, he does not imply that the mountain always represents a liaison between man and God—there is also the potential for evil. In some works, the mountain inspires fear, terror, and mystery as well as a reflection of man's inner turmoil, such as we find in Byron's *Manfred*

¹⁴⁴ See lines 79-85.

¹⁴⁵ See lines 76-83.

(1817). Likewise, in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), the sight of Mont Blanc, which once comforted Victor Frankenstein, eventually becomes the designated meeting ground with his fearful creature.

Coinciding with the rise of the Victorian novelist, the portrayal of mountains as sublime entities, characterised by the Romantic poets, began to fade. Yet, the element of danger was retained. Marvellous as they may have been to the Victorian novelist, mountains were depicted as places of isolation and barriers to society.¹⁴⁶ Though it is present, we find very little mountain imagery in the Victorian novel. According to George Levine, the novelists of that time 'tended to place happiness in bounded human landscapes. Salvation for heroes and heroines comes in fields, on farms, in towns, on rivers or beside them, and certainly beside the hearth' (139). He goes on to suggest later:

As Romantic poetry tended to invoke the most obviously separate and humanly diminishing landscapes to reassert meaningfulness and connectedness, so the Victorian novel, reflecting a Carlylean disenchantment with the sublime, tended to find meaning and connection in the more human landscapes of the lowlands and rivers where disconnection was not a private feeling but a social fact. (142-3)

However, this is where MacDonald, as a Victorian novelist, stands apart from his fellow writers. Mountains still arouse a significant sense of awe in MacDonald which he incorporates in his fiction. Danger is present, yes, but the only 'monsters' encountered are the inner monsters within the characters themselves. The only danger is that of a mortal's proximity to a divine power, such as Moses' experience with the burning bush. This idea is illustrated in MacDonald's poem, 'The Unseen Face' (1871), which is short enough to be quoted in its entirety.

'I do beseech thee, God, show me thy face.'
'Come up to me in Sinai on the morn!
Thou shalt behold as much as may be borne.'
And on a rock stood Moses, lone in space.
From Sinai's top, the vaporous, thunderous place,

¹⁴⁶ See George Levine's article, 'High and Low: Ruskin and the Novelists' in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, pp. 137-52, pp. 137-8.

God passed in cloud, an earthy garment worn
 To hide, and thus reveal. In love, not scorn,
 He put him in a clift [sic] of the rock's base,
 Covered him with his hand, his eyes to screen—
 Passed—lifted it: his back alone appears!
 Ah, Moses, had he turned, and hadst thou seen
 The pale face crowned with thorns, baptized with tears,
 The eyes of the true man, by men belied,
 Thou hadst beheld God's face, and straightway died!¹⁴⁷

MacDonald proposes in this poem that God's face, as visible through the 'veil' of Nature, is a holy terror. Yet, the key to the poem is the idea that MacDonald presents God as behind the 'veil'—Nature, in this case, via the mountain, is the only way that man may see the person of God.

Yet, despite the ability of his characters to find God on the mountain-tops, they are, nevertheless, separated from their fellow men. As Wordsworth discovered—Nature is a source of instruction and inspiration for humanity.¹⁴⁸ MacDonald's heroes discover, too, that to remain on the mountain would be for them to forsake society and forfeit human brotherhood; therefore, their obligation to become (or remain) fellow-workers with God prompts them to descend the mountains and to enter the towns below. What we learn is that MacDonald represents the mountain as a symbol for an all-encompassing Nature. Indeed, MacDonald retains the Romantic awe regarding the mountain. For him, it is not a place where the natural and the spiritual collide but where they unite.

MacDonald feared that his generation was beginning to lose touch with Nature. To combat this, he depicted the image of the mountain as a place located outside society and away from the city where man can find God. Eventually, as we shall see, MacDonald began to realise that the symbol of the mountain was too far removed from his readers. Thus, he turned from the

¹⁴⁷ George MacDonald, 'The Unseen Face' in *PW1*, pp. 251-2.

¹⁴⁸ See William Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, Book VI, p. 535, lines 543-56 and 592-616, Book VIII, p. 555, lines 665-86, and Book XIII, p. 579, lines 1-63.

Alps and focused his attention upon practical places in Britain that his readers would find more accessible, such as trees, towers, hilltops, even London's Hampstead Heath and Harrow-on-the-Hill. Thus, mountain-tops were replaced with less awe-inspiring places, but places, nonetheless, which evoked solitude and where a character can simply 'be still'.

In his first publication, *Within and Without: A Dramatic Poem* (1855), MacDonald makes a subtle reference to Bunyan and Dante with the spiritual mountain. The final scene in the last act takes place 'on the summit of a mountain-peak' where the three main characters are supposedly in the afterlife (*PWI, Within and Without*, 131). Lilia, who had separated herself from her husband and child, must *climb* to join them at the peak. MacDonald's stage direction states that her husband 'reaches his hand, and the three are clasped in an infinite embrace' (*PWI, Within and Without*, 131). A strikingly similar image is portrayed near the conclusion of MacDonald's final fantasy novel, *Lilith* (1895), in which the main characters, Vane and Lona, *climb* up the metaphorical mountain leading to the 'throne of the Ancient of Days'; again, a hand reaches down, clasps the outstretched hand, pulling the climber upward.¹⁴⁹ For both works, these *mountains* are metaphorical and point back to Mount Zion and the Delectable Mountains in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* as well as those within Dante's *Divina Commedia*. MacDonald may not have intended the mountains in his non-fantasy novels to be taken as metaphors, though they still retain ample spiritual meaning.

The awe which MacDonald's mountains evoke is based upon biblical symbolism and reflects the Hebrew stories of Abraham's attempted sacrifice of his son, Isaac, upon Mount Moriah (Genesis 22.2-18) and Moses' interactions with God upon Mount Sinai—once when God revealed himself in the form of a burning bush (Exodus 3-4.17) and later when he gave the 'Ten

¹⁴⁹ George MacDonald, *Lilith: A Romance* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1895; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2001), Chapter XLVI, 'The City', p. 356.

Commandments' (Exodus 19.1-25). Also, and perhaps more reflective of what his heroes encounter within the novels, MacDonald's inspiration comes directly from the life and experiences of Christ. According to the biblical tradition, most of Christ's major life events took place upon mountain-tops. During his seclusion in the wilderness, he was continuously tempted by Satan upon a mountain (Matthew 4.8-11). His famous 'Sermon' was delivered upon a mountain-side (Matthew 5-7). His mystical 'transfiguration' was said to have taken place upon a 'high mountain' (Matthew 17.1-9). His betrayal and arrest took place on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26.30-57). His crucifixion took place upon the 'hill' of Golgotha (Matthew 27.33). After his death and resurrection, Christ met with his disciples upon an unnamed mountain and commissioned them to minister throughout the world (Matthew 28.16-20); immediately after this commission, he ascended into Heaven (Acts 1.9). Lastly, during his apocalyptic vision, John wrote that he witnessed Christ's return upon Mount Zion (Revelation 14.1). It is no wonder, then, that MacDonald held mountains in such high regard for he saw them as sacred places.

Unlike Coleridge, whose transcendental revelation was brought on by his imaginative excursion to Mont Blanc, MacDonald received his experience of seeing mountains firsthand. Ruskin, who had visited the Alps in his youth, encouraged MacDonald to visit them as well. In fact, Ruskin was so adamant that the expedition be made that he proposed to finance MacDonald's expenses. Ruskin wrote to MacDonald, stating:

The main thing is, you are *not* to disturb yourself about money, as long as I am to the fore [...] and if you would like to stay longer than a month, and are happy, I'll send you over some money as my papa used to do to me.—I feel wonderfully like an old man of the world writing to his boy going out for his first happy holidays.¹⁵⁰

Whether or not MacDonald accepted Ruskin's financial gift, he, along with William Matheson and William Sainsbury, made the expedition during the summer of 1865.

¹⁵⁰ 'Letter to MacDonald, 22 July 1865', in Derrick Leon, *Ruskin: The Great Victorian* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1969), p. 355.

MacDonald's Swiss holiday was, arguably, one of his greatest experiences in life. His exposure to the Alps became for him a spiritual revelation and was quickly interpreted as a way of standing in the presence of God. These ideas were expressed in several letters that he sent to his wife. An example of such is found in a letter he wrote to Louisa during his stay in Mürren:

Yet I am not sure whether amidst the lovely chaos of shifting clouds I have seen the highest peak of the Jungfrau. It is utterly useless to try to describe it.... I hate the photographs, they convey *no* idea. The tints and the lines and the mass and the streams and the vapours, and the mingling, and the infinitude, and the loftiness, the glaciers and the slow crawling avalanches—they cannot be described.

Once to-day, looking through the mist, I said with just a slight reservation of doubt in my heart, 'There that is as high as I want it to be,' and straightway I saw a higher point grow out of the mist beyond. So I have found it with all the ways of God. ('Letter to Louisa, n.d.', in *GMDW*, 350)

It is interesting to see how MacDonald moves from giving a physical description of the mountains to employing the use of a spiritual analogy in order to suggest what the mountains signify.

Louisa's response to MacDonald reveals a curious fusion of feeling sympathetic to his spirituality and a fear that, in his eagerness, he is liable to fall into danger. Louisa writes: 'I hope you won't try exploring by yourself.... I am not afraid of your doing it for the sake of saying you have done wonderful things but I am afraid of your doing it for the sake of getting "divine air" from "God's steeples"' ('Letter to George MacDonald, n.d.', in Hein, *George MacDonald—Victorian Mythmaker*, 244). Indeed, Louisa would not have been surprised by MacDonald's spiritual representation of the Alps. As well, for readers of MacDonald's work, it seems natural that he would bestow a spiritual meaning upon them; yet, it was not very common, even in MacDonald's day, for a writer to *spiritualise* his Alpine excursion.

The majority of publications dealing with Alpine excursions during the second half of the nineteenth century were produced by members of the Alpine Club, which was established in London on 22 December 1857. Although the primary purpose of the club was, obviously, to

bring together climbing enthusiasts, it also sought to educate society about its members' excursions. Their first attempt was a series of essays entitled *Peaks, Passes, and Glaciers* (1858-62). Out of these publications grew the *Alpine Journal*.

The *Alpine Journal* remains in print today and has long been noted for its objective style of writing. Indeed, members of the Alpine Club refrained from the usage of subjective, emotional language. Instead of approaching the peaks as 'God's steeples' and falling upon their knees in a spirit of worship, Alpine Club men, when climbing, pushed aside any thoughts or feelings which had the potential of distracting their attention. Their survival (and that of their team) depended upon their ability to remain focussed. Self-discipline instead of self-reflection was crucial to the success of their expedition. As well, instead of carrying a volume of Wordsworth or the Bible in their packs as did Robert Falconer during his solitary wanderings through the Alps, they brought scientific journals, barometers, and other tools whereby they might receive and convey factual information to their readers.

The Alpine Club's objectivity of writing about the Alps contrasted with Ruskin's emotionally intense style of writing. Although he eventually joined the Club in 1869, Ruskin's initial opinions of its members and the growing rate of Alpine tourism were adamantly in the negative. In his lecture, 'Of King's Treasures', published in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), Ruskin chastises the English manner, which he calls 'a consuming white leprosy', of invading and polluting foreign lands:

You have despised Nature; that is to say, all the deep and sacred sensations of natural scenery. The French revolutionists made stables of the cathedrals of France; you have made race-courses of the cathedrals of the earth. Your *one* conception of pleasure is to drive in railroad carriages round their aisles, and eat off their altars.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ John Ruskin, 'Of King's Treasures' in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) (London: George Allen, Sunnyside, Orpington, 1895), pp. 1-86, p. 58.

Ruskin follows ‘altars’ with a footnote explaining that they are ‘places to be reverent in, and to worship in’ (58). Next, Ruskin indirectly attacks the endeavours of the Alpine Club, claiming:

the Alps themselves, which your own poets used to love so reverently, you look upon as soaped poles in a bear-garden, which you set yourselves to climb and slide down again, with ‘shrieks of delight.’ When you are past shrieking, having no human articulate voice to say you are glad with, you fill the quietude of their valleys with gunpowder blasts, and rush home, red with cutaneous [sic] eruption of conceit, and voluble with convulsive hiccough of self-satisfaction. (59)

David Robertson suggests that the cannon blast refers to Albert Smith’s reception at Chamonix after his team ascended Mont Blanc in 1851.¹⁵²

Despite MacDonald’s enthusiasm for the Alps, he was never a member of the Alpine Club even though he was acquainted with Leslie Stephen, one of the Club’s key members whom he met during one of George Murray Smith’s dinners (*GMDW*, 320).¹⁵³ Stephen joined the Alpine Club shortly after its formation in 1857, edited the *Alpine Journal* (1863-72), and eventually served as its president (1865-8). He was one of the leading writers about the Alps and, like other Alpine Club writers, was strongly opposed to the idea of romanticising or spiritualising mountain imagery in his work.¹⁵⁴

MacDonald never wavered from this opposition and consistently presented the Alps as a spiritual place in his writings. In *Wilfrid Cumbermede* (1872), MacDonald mentions the Eiger and the Matterhorn:

If a man has any sense of the infinite, he cannot fail to be rendered capable of higher things by such embodiments of the high. Otherwise, they are heaps of dirt, to be scrambled up and conquered, for scrambling and conquering’s [sic] sake. They are but warts, Pelion and Ossa and all of them. (*WC*, Chapter XVI, ‘The Ice-Cave’, 141)¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² David Robertson, ‘Mid-Victorians amongst the Alps’ in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, pp. 113-36, p. 113.

¹⁵³ George Murray Smith (of Smith, Elder & Co.) published MacDonald’s *Phantastes* (1858) and *The Portent* (1864).

¹⁵⁴ See Robertson, pp. 123-6.

¹⁵⁵ Pelion and Ossa are two mountains in Greece.

His first attempt at writing about the Alps began as soon as he returned to England with the little-known story, 'A Journey Rejourneyed', published in *The Argosy* (1865-6); it was later revised and republished in the 1882 edition of *Adela Cathcart*.

MacDonald's story tells of an Alpine excursion made by James Bayley, a young clerk in London. James's aunt died and left him thirty pounds so that he might go 'into mourning for her'.¹⁵⁶ However, James decided against that and used the money to fund a holiday to Switzerland, claiming that it was 'better to go into gladness for her' ('A Journey Rejourneyed', 54). With this initial point, MacDonald challenges the social obligation to mourn in misery. Instead, he proposes that it is a better idea to make an outing into Nature—and thus to celebrate the idea that a loved one has finally attained harmony with Nature.

The bulk of the story is basically MacDonald's way of relating his own experiences with the Alps. Several points in James's story converge with MacDonald's letters to his wife, and much of James's dialogue is transcribed from these documents. For instance, James proclaims the 'poverty of photography in recording such visions':

I hate the photographs. They convey no idea but of extreme outline. The tints, and the lines, and the mass, and the shadows, and the steams, and the vapours, and the mingling, and the infinitude, and the loftiness, and the glaciers, and the slow-crawling avalanches cannot be represented. ('A Journey Rejourneyed', 55)

As well, both James and his author travelled the Alps on the back of a trusty horse named Mattie.¹⁵⁷ Yet, MacDonald does much more in this story than simply recount his experiences in Switzerland.

James begins to personify the mountains as spiritual beings residing between heaven and earth: 'where they sit judging the tribes of men that go creeping about below them after the

¹⁵⁶ George MacDonald, 'A Journey Rejourneyed' in *The Argosy* (London: Strahan, 1865-6), pp. 53-63 and 127-33, p. 54.

¹⁵⁷ See MacDonald's 'Letter to Louisa, n.d.', in Hein, p. 250, and 'A Journey Rejourneyed', p. 127.

eating, and the drinking, and the clothing, and never lift up their heads into the solitary air to be alone with Him with whom solitude and union are one' ('A Journey Rejourneyed', 56). His metaphor divides the mountains and those who can appreciate them from the multitudes of *mammon*-worshippers. Sounding more like Ruskin's tirade in *Sesame and Lilies*, which was published the same year, James moves from his social critique to bemoaning the presence of the railway: 'It has a right to be somewhere, but not there' ('A Journey Rejourneyed', 57). Finally, James criticises the undignified manner of English tourists visiting the Alps as well as their manner of relating their travels to others. Disturbed by what he labels as their '*snobbery*', James argues that Nature must be freely given to all. Thus, he claims, 'the Alps will be the stair up to the throne of God' ('A Journey Rejourneyed', 59). Believing that man's ultimate purpose is to serve God by loving his fellow man, MacDonald felt that to present the Alps as a collection of natural facts would be futile—instead, he was more concerned with presenting them as spiritual truths, which he calls 'sermons in stone' ('A Journey Rejourneyed', 59).

At one point during James's excursion, he suddenly comes upon the Jungfrau. James speaks of the encounter as if it were a holy moment: 'I could have fallen on my knees before it' ('A Journey Rejourneyed', 128). Again, describing such an encounter as holy would hardly have been acceptable for other Victorian travel writers, especially those belonging to the Alpine Club; yet, MacDonald continued to write of such sacred encounters in the Alpine regions. Both *Robert Falconer* and *Wilfrid Cumbermede* depict moments in which the hero falls to his knees at the face of a mountain in an act of spiritual worship.

Towards the end of the story, James reflects upon both the physical and spiritual nature of the mountain and discovers that it is a place where God and man are joined by holy fear. James claims:

They are terrible creatures, these mountains. They never love, never have any children; stand there in the cold, and the wind, and the snow, crawled over by the serpent-glaciers, worn and divided by the keen grinding saw of the long-drawn torrents: they feel nothing, they hope nothing. But glorious are the rivers that come down from their glaciers, sweeping blue and bank-full through the lovely towns of the land; and glorious are the mountain-thoughts—the spiritually-metamorphosed reflection of themselves—they raise in the minds of the men. ('A Journey Rejourneyed', 131)

Such 'mountain-thoughts' are precisely what divides MacDonald's manner of mountain writing from other, more objective writings. As well, MacDonald turns the rivers into a metaphor, calling them the 'mountain-thoughts' which affect the imagination of man—thus, these thoughts flow from the imagination of God into the heart of man, an idea that he introduces later in his essay, 'The Imagination: Its Function and Its Culture' (1867).¹⁵⁸

The final point of interest that MacDonald makes in this story is that although James may have come awake somewhere within the solitudes of the Alpine region, his waking life required him to connect with his fellow man; and so he had to descend the mountain-top and return to his job at the bank in London. A similar link can be suggested with Chapter XCII of *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (1865). In the novel, Alec joins the crew of the *Sea-Horse*, an Arctic-bound ship. His excursion ends suddenly after the ship collides with an iceberg and sinks. However, Alec and his fellow crew members save themselves with a lifeboat which they use to travel to Greenland. Once on land, they trek across the country, looking for any signs of human civilisation. Their journey is arduous and most of them die except for Alec and a few others. One morning, Alec wakes and discovers that he has been left behind (blaming the despair of the situation). This unfortunate event plunges Alec into total solitude and brings him to an existential crisis. His first thought is to return to Annie Anderson; then, he begins to understand his solitude. Alec tells Annie:

¹⁵⁸ See pp. 5-19.

I think a body may some day get a kin' o' a sicht o' the face o' God.—I was sae dooncast, when I saw mysel' left ahin', that I sat doon upon a rock and glowered at naething. It was awfu'. An' it grew waur and waur, till the only comfort I had was that I cudna live lang. And wi' that the thocht o' God cam' into my heid, and it seemed as gin I had a richt, as it war, to call upon him—I was sae miserable.

And there cam' ower me a quaietness, and like a warm breath o' spring air. I dinna ken what it was—but it set me upo' my feet, and I startit to follow the lave. [...].

The silence at first had been fearfu'; but noo, somehow or ither, I canna richtly explain 't, the silence seemed to be God himsel' a' about me.

And I'll never forget him again, Annie.¹⁵⁹

Alec's ability to *recount* his adventure is a crucial moment for both him and Annie who sits listening. MacDonald writes: 'Was there ever a gladder heart than Annie's? She was weeping as if her life would flow away in tears. She had known that Alec would come back to God some day' (*AF*, Chapter XCII, 439). Though James Bayley does not suffer the solitude that Alec had to face in the Arctic, his experience leaves him with a mission similar to that of Coleridge's ancient mariner: his story must be told.

'A Journey Rejourneyed' begins with the narrator, a young lady named Jane, who describes the setting of James's visit to her and her bed-ridden sister, Lizzie. James's mission requires him to tell his story to Lizzie, in particular. Since she will most likely never leave London (nor her bedroom for that matter), James has to bring Nature to her. Furthermore, Jane recounts the marvellous effect his story had upon Lizzie for it made her 'sleep all night with a smile on the face which constant pain makes so white' ('A Journey Rejourneyed', 53). And so it is that James's mission to share his story is aided by Jane, a fellow-worker.

The same may be suggested regarding Robert Falconer. During his solitary wanderings throughout the Alps, much time is spent in biblical meditation and trying to understand the philosophical problem of *peace*. Robert discovers this answer to this problem and descends the mountain to commence what he feels is God's work in the London slums (*RF*, Part III, Chapter I,

¹⁵⁹ George MacDonald, *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1865; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2003); cited as *AF*, Chapter XCII, p. 439.

‘The Desert’, 398-9). Robert’s physical act of descent is, for MacDonald, a symbolic act prefigured by Abraham’s descent of Mount Moriah with his son that had been spared a sacrificial death, Moses’ descent of Mount Sinai with the ‘Ten Commandments’, and Christ’s return from the wilderness before the commencement of his ministry in Jerusalem. MacDonald would have interpreted both Abraham’s and Christ’s mountainous descents as a sign of renewed faith and the determination to bring God and man together.

‘A Journey Rejourneyed’ was MacDonald’s first attempt at writing about the Alps and although he made a brief return to them in *Robert Falconer*, it was not until *Wilfrid Cumberland* that MacDonald used the image of the mountain specifically as a symbol for God in Nature. *Wilfrid Cumberland*, in various ways, is an English ‘social novel’—much in the same vein as its Scottish counterparts, *Robert Falconer*, *Sir Gibbie*, and *Castle Warlock*. The novel tells the story of Wilfrid Cumberland, beginning with his boyhood and then moving onwards to his education and life as an adult. As with most of MacDonald’s heroes, Wilfrid grows up in a rural setting and eventually relocates to the city (London in this novel). Though other heroes are particularly attracted to Nature in MacDonald’s novels, Wilfrid is especially sensitive to its powers. Thus, when he, as a youth, is sent to Switzerland for part of his education, he undergoes a spiritual revelation or symbolic baptism which forever changes his outlook on life. It is with this portion of the novel that we are primarily concerned in this study.

Robert Lee Wolff has criticised the novel, claiming that it ‘collapses hopelessly’ (277). Indeed, the first half of the novel, especially with Wilfrid’s excursion to Switzerland, is rich in visualisation and symbolic implication, but the intensity of the novel begins to taper with the overlapping structure of the plot and the conclusion feels rather frustrated. As well, the Swiss portion of the novel recycles and greatly expands most of ‘A Journey Rejourneyed’, save for

James Bayley, his listeners, and a few other minor details. Regardless of its faults, *Wilfrid Cumbermede* is remarkable in its presentation of the mountain as a meeting ground for man and God.

Wilfrid is also an interesting character due to his connection with Ruskin. Greville MacDonald was the first to make this suggestion and claims that his father's incentive for writing *Wilfrid Cumbermede* was based upon his knowledge of Ruskin's works.¹⁶⁰ Wolff considers the Ruskin connection a little further and discusses the troubled affair between Ruskin and Rose la Touche (268, 270, 276-7, and 281-2). Yet, comparisons between Wilfrid and Wordsworth are even more prominent. Although MacDonald never implies directly that Wordsworth served as Wilfrid's prototype, the philosophical resemblances between Wilfrid and Wordsworth are strikingly apparent.

One of the earliest comparisons is made when Wilfrid, as a child, first discovers God. Wilfrid's childhood is spent mostly in solitude. Although he is cared for by his uncle and their housekeeper, Wilfrid begins to show signs that his education has been neglected. Therefore, his uncle makes it his duty to begin instructing Wilfrid. Yet his manner of education is unusual: 'Like Jean Paul, he would utter the name of God to a child only at grand moments [such as during a thunderstorm]' (WC, Chapter V, 'I Have Lessons', 30). Thus, one day, Wilfrid's uncle takes him on a walk which leads them to climb a hill. The event marks a unique moment for the young hero. Standing on top of the hill, Wilfrid realises that this is the first time he has ever been so high and notices that there is an 'indescribable hush in the air' (WC, Chapter V, 'I Have Lessons', 30). Moreover, Wilfrid realises that his uncle is experiencing the same feeling of sacredness. Wilfrid states:

¹⁶⁰ See GMDW, pp. 351-2, for a brief comparison between MacDonald's *Wilfrid Cumbermede* and Ruskin's *Præterita* (1885-89).

I looked up in my uncle's face. It shone in a calm glow, like an answering rosy moon.
The eyes of my mind were opened: I saw that he felt something, and then I felt it too. His
soul, with the glory for an interpreter, kindled mine.

He, in turn, caught the sight of my face, and his soul broke forth in one word:—
'God! Willie; God!' was all he said; and surely it was enough. (WC, Chapter V,
'I Have Lessons', 31)

MacDonald is illustrating several ideas with this scene. Understanding these will give us clues to unlocking MacDonald's philosophy of Nature in this book.

First, Wilfrid's initial sense of God's presence is formed when he is standing at the top of a hill. His realisation comes along with his awe of Nature. Second, MacDonald is clearly referencing the connection Wordsworth desires to share with his sister in his poem, 'Lines Written a Short Distance from My House'. What Wordsworth discovers in Nature is love:

Love, now a universal birth,
From heart to heart is stealing,
From earth to man, from man to earth:
—It is the hour of feeling.¹⁶¹

This connection is finally established later in 'Tintern Abbey':

in thy voice I catch
The language of my former heart, and read
My former pleasures in the shooting lights
Of thy wild eyes. ('Tintern Abbey', 165, lines 116-9)

In both cases, the intimacy between Wordsworth and his sister arises from their shared response to the natural scene. The connection between Wilfrid and his uncle comes about in a similar manner. Yet, not only does Wilfrid feel the presence of a spirit that 'rolls through all things', but he is instructed to identify the feeling of the moment with the reality of God ('Tintern Abbey', 164, line 102). This brings us to MacDonald's third point: human connectivity. As Wordsworth is finding a connection to his sister with his feelings, so is Wilfrid finding a connection to his

¹⁶¹ Wordsworth, 'Lines Written a Short Distance from My House' ('To My Sister') in *Poetical Works*, p. 378, lines 21-4.

uncle. Human society (brotherhood) is the key for both Wordsworth and MacDonald. In ‘Tintern Abbey’, Wordsworth writes:

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man’s eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and ’mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man’s life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love. (‘Tintern Abbey’, 164, lines 22-35)

Wordsworth’s idea here is that Nature helps him to simply be a better person. MacDonald takes a similar idea, but reconstructs it to suggest that Nature helps his heroes to serve their communities. Whenever a hero in MacDonald’s work (such as Gibbie Galbraith and Robert Falconer) retreats to a mountain in solitude, and falls to his knees in a state of awe-inspired worship, an intense longing always follows for him to descend and re-enter society for the sake of serving humanity. Though MacDonald is clearly referencing Christ’s seclusion in the wilderness, the allusion to Wordsworth is also perceptible.

Some examples are far more direct, such as Wilfrid’s first encounter with a mountain. Whilst sailing in a boat, Wilfrid encounters the Jungfrau which had been concealed by a thick layer of clouds. Almost as soon as it is revealed, the gargantuan sight is again concealed ‘into its Holy of Holies’ (WC, Chapter XV, ‘Away’, 136). Wilfrid confesses the significance of the event: ‘I have *been* more ever since that sight. To have beheld a truth is an apotheosis. What the truth was I could not tell; but I had seen something which raised me above my former self and made me long to rise higher yet’ (WC, Chapter XV, ‘Away’, 136). Wilfrid’s experience ‘awoke worship, and a belief in the comprehensible divine’ (WC, Chapter XV, ‘Away’, 136). This scene,

along with Wilfrid's confession, echoes lines in Book I of *The Prelude* when the poem's speaker steps out into a boat one evening and encounters a mountain near the lake:

With trembling oars I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the covert of the willow tree;
There in her mooring-place I left my bark,—
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave
And serious mood; but after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; o'er my thoughts
There hung darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion. No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams. (*The Prelude*, Book I, 499, lines 385-400)

Both Wilfrid and the speaker of *The Prelude* are awestruck by this sudden *emergence* of the mountain. This is significant because it suggests that a person's first genuine encounter with Nature prompts a sense of fear. Yet, Wilfrid and the speaker of *The Prelude* interpret the sudden emergence of the mountain differently. Wordsworth seems to be writing about the awakened guilty conscience of having taken (or stolen) the boat; he is thinking about the *moral* development of his speaker. MacDonald, on the other hand, is representing the *spiritual* development of Wilfrid.

Interestingly, Wilfrid's companion in this scene, Charlie Osborne, is plagued by guilt. His father is stern and puritanical, warning the two boys to distrust any feelings that Nature should arouse in them. Wilfrid claims that one evening Mr Osborne: 'gave us a solemn admonishment on the danger of being led astray by what men called the beauties of Nature—for the heart was so desperately wicked that, even of the things God had made *to show his power*, it would make snares for our destruction' (WC, Chapter XVI, 'The Ice-Cave', 138). Charlie reveals later that his 'father is sure that the love of nature is not only a delusion, but a snare' (WC, Chapter XXXV, 'A

Talk with Charlie', 298-9). In *Robert Falconer*, the hero's grandmother shares a similar puritanical assumption regarding music; yet, the actions she takes to protect her grandson from the snares of music derive from her love. Mr Osborn's actions are devoid of love.

Towards the conclusion of *Wilfrid Cumbermede*, Wilfrid praises the work of Wordsworth. The poetry of Wordsworth and the other Romantics did not come to Wilfrid until much later in his adulthood. Of those works which Wilfrid claims to have benefitted his life, *The Excursion* is the greatest. Wilfrid claims:

To this book I owe so much that to me it would alone justify the conviction that Wordsworth will never be forgotten. That he is no longer the fashion, militates nothing against his reputation. We, the old ones, hold fast by him for no sentimental reminiscence of the fashion of our youth, but simply because his humanity has come into contact with ours. [...] Wordsworth will recede through the gliding ages until, with the greater Chaucer, and the greater Shakspeare, and the greater Milton, he is yet a star in the constellated crown of England. (WC, Chapter LXIII, 'A Collision', 507)

By referring to himself as one of the 'old ones', Wilfrid places himself in a community that was either a part of the Romantic generation or with those that at least share their philosophies and strive to uphold them in the present.

While Wilfrid narrates his story, he confesses that he had no knowledge of Wordsworth in his youth. He claims, before setting off for Switzerland, that he had reached a state of poetic sensitivity that opened him to a greater perception of his world:

The fact is I was coming in for my share in the spiritual influences of Nature, so largely poured on the heart and mind of my generation. The prophets of the new blessing, Wordsworth and Coleridge, I knew nothing of. Keats was only beginning to write. I had read a little of Cowper, but did not care for him. Yet I was under the same spell as they all. Nature was a power upon me. I was filled with the vague recognition of a present soul in Nature—with a sense of the humanity everywhere diffused through her and operating upon ours. (WC, Chapter XV, 'Away', 131-2)

MacDonald is making a risky claim with Wilfrid's confession. The idea that Wilfrid can share Wordsworth's thoughts and feelings regarding the 'spiritual influences of Nature' without ever having read them, implies that the underlying philosophies of the Romantic movement were

more than products signifying a literary phenomenon—they were, for MacDonald, significant indicators of higher truths.

Though the Alps continued to symbolise for him dramatic places where man and God may come together, MacDonald eventually ceased writing about them and, instead, wrote about domestic places in Britain with which his readers could identify. This change of direction is already apparent near the conclusion of *Wilfrid Cumbermede*. After complaining about the masses of tourism in Switzerland, Wilfrid changes his tone and begins to analyse the spiritual meaning behind the winter season. Wilfrid muses:

For the mountains will endure but a season of intrusion. If travellers linger too long within their hospitable gates, their humour changes, and, with fierce winds and snow and bitter sleet, they will drive them forth, preserving their Winter privacy for the bosom friends of their mistress, Nature. (WC, Chapter LXIV, 'Yet Once', 514)

In this change of tone, Wilfrid recognises his ability to find God in other places.

God, as Wilfrid discovers, is not limited to geographically high places. Thus, he must be sought and found in the regions below. He continues:

David [the biblical king] communed with his own heart on his bed and was still—there finding God: communing with my own heart in the Winter-valleys of Switzerland I found at least what made me cry out: 'Surely this is the house of God; this is the gate of heaven!' I would not be supposed to fancy that God is in mountains, and not in plains—that God is in the solitude, and not in the city: in any region harmonious with its condition and necessities, it is easier for the heart to be still, and in its stillness to hear the still small voice. (WC, Chapter LXIV, 'Yet Once', 514)

Both Wilfrid and MacDonald are making a departure from the mountains to the plains below where society dwells. Wilfrid, it seems, has come full circle from when he was *introduced* to God by his uncle on the hill-top. Like Wordsworth, Wilfrid's maturity has enabled him to look upon Nature, 'not as in the hour | Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes | The still, sad music of humanity' (Wordsworth, 'Tintern Abbey', 164, lines 89-91).

In the end, although MacDonald would continue to incorporate mountain imagery as significant backdrops within the later novels such as *Sir Gibbie*, *What's Mine's Mine*, and

Heather and Snow, no more fictional excursions were ever made to the Alps (or abroad for that matter). Indeed, characters in these novels retreat to these mountains (all of which are located in either the Grampians or Highlands of Scotland), but discover a more lasting connection to God when they do his work by moving amongst and serving society in the cities below.

Part Three

Victorian Environmentalism and Urban Green Space in *Guild Court*¹⁶²

In his study on Victorian social health issues, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain*, Anthony S. Wohl argues that the Victorians equated public health with spiritual health:

For the Victorians, public health, like so many other social reforms and endeavours, took on the form of a moral crusade. To most Victorians, epidemics were not scourges sent by God to punish man for his sins but were the consequences of man's sinful neglect of God's earth and of His injunction to care for the sick and the weak. Sanitary reform, health care, visiting the poor, slum clearance, education of the poor in matters of health and hygiene, were all vital causes for a people inspired by both the evangelical concept of duty and, increasingly, a new secular concern for the well-ordering of society. (*Endangered Lives*, 6)

Wohl continues to suggest that for the Victorians:

there could be no moral, religious, or intellectual improvement without physical improvement. [...] If the diagnosis was that immorality was rooted in physical impurity then the remedy, the preventive medicine, called for the abolition of evil through abolition of dirt and disease. It was a challenge which could not fail to strike a chord in the bosom of Victorian evangelical Christianity. (*Endangered Lives*, 6-7)

This issue is clearly represented in MacDonald's fiction. In *Robert Falconer*, MacDonald writes that the hero 'knew that misery and wretchedness are the right and best condition of those who

¹⁶² An earlier draft of this section has recently appeared in *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, 31 (2012), pp. 18-30.

live so that misery and wretchedness are the natural consequences of their life' (*RF*, Part III, Chapter XI, 'The Suicide', 492). Yet, he goes further, adding:

But there ought always to be the possibility of emerging from these; and as things were, over the whole country, for many who would if they could, it was impossible to breathe fresh air, to be clean, to live like human beings. And he saw this difficulty ever on the increase [...]. (*RF*, Part III, Chapter XI, 'The Suicide', 492)

As was discussed in the previous chapter, Robert's strategy for bringing about this 'emergence' was by improving the dwellings of the poor and by instructing the poor to help their fellow neighbours.

By the mid-nineteenth century, novelists began to explore environmental issues and their effects on the quality of human health. Dickens appears to have been particularly concerned with the relationship between health and the environment. A few of these concerns are nestled within his novels. *Bleak House* (1853) opens with an elaborate yet dreary portrait of an almost impenetrable London fog. Later, Esther Summerson's first impression of London upon her arrival is marked by the uncanny density of this fog. Fearing that a great fire may have taken place, 'for the streets were so full of dense brown smoke that scarcely anything was to be seen', Esther is told that it is nothing more than a 'London particular'.¹⁶³ Following this, she 'drove slowly through the dirtiest and darkest streets that ever were seen in the world [...], and in such a distracting state of confusion that [she] wondered how the people kept their senses' (*Bleak House*, 37).

Indeed, a fog with this level of density was commonly called a 'London particular' or a 'pea-souper', due to its thick brownish-yellow hue; today, it is a significant indicator of harmful air pollution called smog. The smog that MacDonald and Dickens would have inhaled on a daily

¹⁶³ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1853; reprinted by Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), p. 37. Dickens opens *Bleak House* with a vivid description of the black London fog, which he uses as a simile for the High Court of Chancery.

basis was caused by coal being burned on a large scale.¹⁶⁴ The consequent fog not only impaired traffic visibility in Victorian London, but it was also malodorous and at one time was blamed for spreading cholera. Miasmatic theory suggested that bad odours not only indicated the presence of a disease, but that the odours *were* the transmitters for disease. Florence Nightingale was convinced by the theory and dedicated the opening chapter ('Ventilation and Warming') to her *Notes on Nursing for the Labouring Classes* (1861). She claims: 'The very first rule of nursing, the first and the last thing upon which a nurse's attention must be fixed, the first essential to the patient [...] is this: TO KEEP THE AIR HE BREATHES AS PURE AS THE EXTERNAL AIR, WITHOUT CHILLING HIM'.¹⁶⁵ One of Britain's strongest promoters of the miasmatic theory was William Farr, who argued that the reeking odours of the polluted Thames were responsible for transmitting cholera. His theory was disputed by John Snow, regarded today as the 'Father of Epidemiology', who, in 1854, having constructed a map marking houses affected with cholera surrounding a public water pump in Soho, discovered that the epidemic was spread not by air but by water contaminated with infected sewage.

Dickens discusses health issues regarding sanitation in *Little Dorrit* (1857) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865). One striking illustration occurs in *Little Dorrit* when, after a fifteen year absence, Arthur Clennam returns to London. The state of the city that Arthur discovers is quite dismal:

Fifty thousand lairs surrounded him where people lived so unwholesomely, that fair water put into their crowded rooms on Saturday night, would be corrupt on Sunday morning; albeit my lord, their county member, was amazed that they failed to sleep in company with their butcher's meat. Miles of close wells and pits of houses, where the inhabitants gasped for air, stretched far away towards every point of the compass. Through the heart of the town a deadly sewer ebbed and flowed, in the place of a fine fresh river.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ For extended discussion on Victorian health issues relating to smog and air pollution, see Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, pp. 205-32.

¹⁶⁵ Florence Nightingale, *Notes on Nursing for the Labouring Classes* (London: Harrison, 1861), p. 7.

¹⁶⁶ Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1857; reprinted by London: Penguin, 1998), p. 41.

Dickens surveys three distinct yet interrelated urban issues in this single moment: the poor quality of air, over-crowded housing shared between humans and livestock, and the polluted condition of the Thames. Pronouncing the river a *deadly sewer* demonstrates his, as well as the public's, growing concerns about the ever increasing state of pollution in the Thames. Wohl claims that around 250 tons of untreated sewage was deposited into the Thames on a daily basis (*Endangered Lives*, 234).

Edwin Chadwick produced his *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1842), which led to the enactment of the 'Public Health Act of 1848'. This reform resulted in the developments of flush toilets throughout London and, eventually, did away with the use of chamber pots. However, the sewage which travelled from the flush toilets to the Thames was not properly treated. Within a few years, the mass levels of faecal material in the Thames became a serious threat to public health and culminated in 1858 as the 'Great Stink'. Soon after, Joseph Bazalgette was commissioned by the city to design and build a more effective sewage system. His work was a major undertaking and was not completed until 1875.¹⁶⁷

One of the most dramatic descriptions of the Thames in MacDonald's fiction is found in *Robert Falconer*. The narrator describes an episode where Robert saves a young lady who has attempted suicide by throwing herself in the river. Robert asks her to examine the water:

'Look,' he said, 'how it crawls along—black and slimy! how silent and yet how fierce! Is that a nice place to go to down there? Would there be any rest there, do you think, tumbled about among filth and creeping things, and slugs that feed on the dead; among drowned women like yourself drifting by, and murdered men, and strangled babies? Is that the door by which you would like to go out of the world?' (*RF*, Part III, Chapter XI, 'The Suicide', 503-4)

¹⁶⁷ See Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, pp. 107-8 and 235-56; Michelle Allen, *Cleansing the City: Sanitary Geographies in Victorian London* (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2008), pp. 24-53; and George Rosen, 'Disease, Debility, and Death' in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, II, pp. 625-67.

The Thames was a notorious watery graveyard. Wohl states that the river ‘served as a convenient depository for the victims of murder and infanticide, and for suicides,’ all of which ‘hardly contributed to [the Thames’s] purity’ (*Endangered Lives*, 234). Numerous images portraying the condition of the deadly nature of the Thames appeared in *Punch*; indeed, the rhetoric which Dickens employs to illustrate the Thames, calling it a *deadly sewer*, appears to have a double meaning, suggesting not only the overwhelming presence of faecal matter in the Thames, but also its connection to cholera and other life-threatening epidemics.

One particular issue that was slow to receive attention was the health benefits of parks and green spaces in central and eastern London. The National Trust was not founded until 1894, but there were a few precursors to the Trust, such as the Commons Preservation Society and the Open Spaces Branch of the Kyrle Society, both of which sought to construct and/or preserve green spaces throughout Britain. By the late-1860s, philanthropists such as Octavia Hill began to implement certain environmental schemes that would promote the construction of public parks and gardens and was convinced that those dwelling in urban poverty had become isolated from Nature and that the sight of flowers provided them with a potential will towards self-improvement. It was common for her to travel to the country, dig up colourful flowers and shrubbery and replant them in various courts throughout London’s slums.¹⁶⁸ She argues in her 1884 pamphlet, that, for the poor, ‘colour is intended to be a perpetual source of delight’ (*Colour, Space, and Music for the People*, 3). She continues, later, to promote the construction of small gardens in poor neighbourhoods, claiming: ‘What the private garden is to the one family, that the common garden is to the many families’ (*Colour, Space, and Music for the People*, 8).

¹⁶⁸ See, for instance, Hill’s ‘Letter to Matthew Davenport Hill, 24 April, 1871’ in C. Edmund Maurice, pp. 267-8 and ‘A Special Extra Letter to Fellow-Workers about a Proposed Inscription on Freshwater Place, 5 October 1873’ in C. Edmund Maurice, pp. 292-5.

Additionally, she suggests that such public green spaces may become substitutes for public-houses that would have initially attracted only men (*Colour, Space, and Music for the People*, 9).

As was discussed in Part One of Chapter Two, MacDonald was interested in environmental reform and contributed money to land preservation, such as the successful preservation of Hilly Fields in Deptford. Indeed, he showed more concern, in his poetry and fiction, over the lack of green space than Dickens did in his novels. This is not to suggest that Dickens was unconcerned with public green spaces in London, but he appears to focus more upon the city and the positive role of human society than he does upon the healing effects of solitude in Nature. In contrast, MacDonald was particularly troubled by the isolation from Nature experienced by those living in urban poverty which, as he saw it, was a great hardship. Thus, he supported Hill's environmental schemes by actively co-operating with the Open Spaces Branch of the Kyrle Society and by opening his garden at the 'Retreat' for the benefit of her impoverished tenants. Endeavours, such as these, show that MacDonald was conscious of the role that the environment played on health. Surprisingly, there is no mention of environmental reforms in his sermons or essays.

In *Guild Court*, MacDonald addresses the beneficial effects that Nature has upon two girls who have never left the city of London. MacDonald depicts both girls as suffering from some form of mental or physical degenerative growth. Perhaps more central to MacDonald's theory, however, is the fact that the absence of Nature within the metropolis has impaired their spiritual progression towards God. It is up to the novel's protagonist, Lucy Burton, a young, budding social worker and admirer of Wordsworth, to mentor the two girls. Based upon her reading of Wordsworth's poetry, Lucy formulates an idea that Nature and God are connected and that exposure to Nature brings one closer to God.

The basic plot of the novel tells of Tom Worboise, a clerk who descends from a wealthy family. At the novel's beginning, Tom and Lucy form an attachment. Lucy genuinely loves Tom and believes that his attentions to her are honest; however, Tom is immature and flirts with another girl, producing a disastrous result. He continues to err further by failing his work-related duties as a clerk and eventually falls into a state of obsessive gambling. After finding himself financially ruined and guilty of theft, both results of his gambling, he attempts to conceal himself in the East End docks of London before fleeing to sea. Eventually, he returns and repents.

In various ways, *Guild Court* is similar to a Dickens novel, offering a large assortment of highly colourful and complex characters. Themes of capitalistic greed and the tribulations of the ever suffering poor abound. The novel also reveals MacDonald's knowledge of the city. Here, London is displayed as a fragmented city where pockets of slum housing projects and squalid conditions may be found neighbouring more well-respected corners. Though MacDonald illustrates that the city is both physically and morally grimy, he does reveal that there are many good people scattered throughout, though they may not be easily found. Such characters, beacons of light in darkest London, resemble the selflessness exhibited by Dickens's characters such as Esther Summerson of *Bleak House* and Amy Dorrit of *Little Dorrit*.

Robert L. Patten argues that the protagonists in a Dickens novel must learn to find hope and salvation in the city, in society, and thus reject the healing power of Nature.¹⁶⁹ Patten's theory suggests the discontinuity between Nature and the city within nineteenth-century literature. Though some novelists and poets appeared to find inspiration only from the country, other writers, such as Dickens, find adequate comfort in the city. Patten states:

Dickens does not look at Nature directly. What was of value in Nature to some Romantics Dickens relocates in the heart and hearth, domesticating natural impulses to a

¹⁶⁹ Robert L. Patten, "'A Surprising Transformation': Dickens and the Hearth' in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, pp. 168-70.

social setting. Thus a power analogous to the healing virtue of Nature can be found in the city, and transformation can take place in that man-made environment. (169)

If this theory is applied, then *Guild Court* is best read as an anti-Dickens novel, for it is neither the hearth nor the presence of community, but parks and the countryside surrounding London that offer spiritual and moral growth for its characters.

In *Guild Court*, MacDonald presents the idea that man becomes blinded by the turmoil and pollution of the city and, as a result, is unable to see and experience the nature of God which is paramount to his spiritual life. Yet, in the novel, only the wealthy have privileged access to green spaces and are able to benefit from them; those who are bound to toil in squalor are seldom free to escape the city. Their outlook upon life becomes tainted with noise and smoke, covering forms of beauty which should inspire them to seek after higher thoughts. Salvation, then, lies in the hands of social workers and caring individuals who work for the good of the poor by bringing them into contact with Nature.

The influence Nature has upon the soul is theorised within MacDonald's analysis of Wordsworth in his *England's Antiphon*, published the same year as *Guild Court*. In *England's Antiphon*, MacDonald claimed that for Wordsworth, 'the benignities of nature restored peace and calmness and hope—sufficient to enable him to look back and gather wisdom' (*EA*, Chapter XXI, 'The New Vision', 304). MacDonald goes further to suggest that:

Such presence of the Father has been an infinitely more active power in the redemption of men than men have yet become capable of perceiving. The divine expressions of Nature, that is, the face of the Father therein visible, began to heal the plague which the worship of knowledge had bred. And the power of her teaching grew from comfort to prayer [...]. Higher than all that Nature can do in the way of direct lessoning, is the production of such holy moods as result in hope, conscience of duty, and supplication. Those who have never felt it have to be told there is in her such a power—yielding to which, the meek inherit the earth. (*EA*, Chapter XXI, 'The New Vision', 304)

MacDonald's point in this passage is explicit: through Nature, the spiritual God becomes physically apparent and may be experienced by human senses. During a time when scientific

studies raised controversy within the established religion of the church, MacDonald, sympathetic to both sides, attempted to combine the responses of natural discovery and man's spiritual pursuit of God by claiming that what humanity learns and loves within Nature is beauty: 'beauty counteracting not contradicting science' (*EA*, Chapter XXIII, 'The Questioning Fervour', 332). Such beauty, then, can be 'a fair channel back to the simplicities of faith in some, and to a holy questioning in others; the one class having for its faith, the other for its hope, that the heart of the Father is a heart like ours, a heart that will receive into its noon the song that ascends from the twilighted hearts of his children' (*EA*, Chapter XXIII, 'The Questioning Fervour', 332).

MacDonald strongly believes that experiencing Nature is essential to an individual's physical and spiritual growth, regardless of social class. In *Guild Court*, there is a subplot involving the social efforts of the aptly-named Lucy, who introduces her interpretation of Wordsworthian idealism for the moral betterment of two young girls, one of whom is a character named Mattie. MacDonald carefully juxtaposes Mattie's relationship with both the city and Nature to show how they affect her physical and spiritual progression. Having lost her mother at a young age, Mattie is left to care for her father, a second-hand bookseller in the claustrophobic neighbourhood of Guild Court. Burdened with premature adulthood, she loses her childhood and develops a rather stern demeanour. Thus, MacDonald consistently labels her mannerisms and speech as 'old-fashioned'. As the story progresses and Mattie remains isolated within Guild Court, she begins to suffer from what seems to be a developing mental disorder. However, as will be discussed shortly, MacDonald is careful to show that Mattie's degenerative condition is not just mental but is also spiritual. Lucy, troubled by Mattie's symptoms, believes that spending

some time away from London may do her good and suggests they take a holiday together to the countryside near Hastings.¹⁷⁰

In a rather comical way, MacDonald details Mattie's perceptions of her journey out of London. Trying to hold on to the familiar, Mattie prejudices the country by the small bit of greenery the train passes whilst still within greater London. She argues in favour of seeing shops versus *green things* that are destined to die. In fact, her greatest argument about whether any good can come from the country rests on the idea that all things they see will die, which frightens her; therefore, she is unable to appreciate the significance of life. MacDonald is thus using Mattie as a metaphor for the human consciousness which has not yet come to understand its spiritual purpose. While this consciousness remains unenlightened, the human soul seeks to promote self-independence, often resulting in rebellion against God.

Yet MacDonald believes that this self-made image of man must die in order that the God-dependent self may rise forth in its place, an idea which he perfected in his final fantasy novel, *Lilith* (1895), where the title character must confront and put to death the image which she has masked over the God-given image for herself (see Chapters XXIX and XXXIX). Though perfected in *Lilith*, the origin of this theory is to be found at the foundation of MacDonald's theology and understanding it reveals what is at the core of Mattie's trepidation. With this mindset, Mattie shares a similarity with Lilith, though Lilith is MacDonald's most extreme example of this character type. Mattie's rejection of anything beautiful, due to her fear that its beauty will fade, signifies her own personal fear that she too will die into nothingness. In the second series of his *Unspoken Sermons* (1885), MacDonald writes that all life yearns for harmony with God:

¹⁷⁰ See *ABNW*, Chapter XXXIV, 'In the Country', for a similar illustration wherein both Nanny and 'Cripple Jim' are removed from London for the sake of their survival. MacDonald seems intent on moving lower-class children out of the city.

‘More life!’ is the unconscious prayer of all creation, groaning and travailing for the redemption of its lord, the son who is not yet a son. Is not the dumb cry to be read in the faces of some of the animals, in the look of some of the flowers, and in many an aspect of what we call Nature?

[...] The problem is, so far to separate from himself that which must yet on him be ever and always and utterly dependent, that it shall have the existence of an individual, and be able to turn and regard him—choose him, and say, ‘I will arise and go to my Father,’ and so develop in itself the highest *Divine* of which it is capable—the will for the good against the evil—the will to be one with the life whence it has come, and in which it still is—the will to close the round of its procession in its return, so working the perfection of reunion—to shape in its own life the ring of eternity—to live immediately, consciously, and active-willingly from its source, from its own very life—to restore to the beginning the end that comes of that beginning—to be the thing the maker thought of when he willed, ere he began to work its being.¹⁷¹

MacDonald’s claim here is that the body and soul of an individual must divorce its self-made image, thereby gaining freedom to attain oneness with Christ. The result is divine harmony and is seen by MacDonald as the pinnacle of man’s evolution. Of equal importance here, is that such oneness with Christ leads a man to perform the work of Christ.¹⁷² Later in the sermon, MacDonald claims:

For we are made for love, not for self. Our neighbour is our refuge; *self* is our demon-foe. Every man is the image of God to every man, and in proportion as we love him, we shall know the sacred fact. The precious thing to human soul is [sic], and one day shall be known to be, every human soul. (*US2*, ‘Life’, 312)

The argument MacDonald appears to make in this sermon recalls Wordsworth’s claim in ‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’ (1800): ‘That we have all of us one human heart’.¹⁷³ All of MacDonald’s hero and heroine characters strive to reach this end. Strangely, he never fully depicts a character as having actually reached this state, though some of them, such as David Elginbrod, Robert Falconer, and Gibbie Galbraith, may be seen as having come close to the mark. In the end, they can only persevere to be more like Christ. In Mattie’s case, her journey

¹⁷¹ George MacDonald, ‘Life’ in *US2*, pp. 296-313, pp. 297-8.

¹⁷² See this illustrated in *WMM*, Chapter XXII, ‘The Princess’.

¹⁷³ William Wordsworth, ‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’ in *Poetical Works*, pp. 443-5, p. 445, line 153.

physically begins with her temporary removal from the city to where she is free to encounter Nature.

Once in the countryside of Hastings, Mattie's fears overtake her senses. The full expanse of the open sky, the immense sea, and the broad landscape which stretches for miles beyond her sight opens her inner eyes to realise the infinite nature of the universe and to perceive just how small she is within it. Mattie feels that she is in danger of becoming lost in the vastness of the world where God cannot find her. MacDonald, then, uses Mattie's fear to explore mankind's faith in God:

[T]he child symbolized those who think they have faith in God, and yet when one of the swaddling bands of system or dogma to which they have been accustomed is removed, or even only slackened, immediately feel as if there were no God, as if the earth under their feet were a cloud, and the sky over them a color, and nothing to trust in anywhere. They rest in their swaddling bands, not in God. The loosening of these is God's gift to them that they may grow. But first they are much afraid. (*GC*, Chapter XXVIII, 'Mattie in the Country', 202)

MacDonald's claim here is that man must overcome the initial feelings of fear and isolation inspired by Nature in order to shift the focus of his thoughts from himself to the infinite nature of God.

Characters with such fears are often shown as being helped by the ideas of Wordsworth. During their time in the countryside, Lucy reads to Mattie from a volume of Wordsworth's poetry and implies that natural elements of beauty, such as flowers, point towards the divine, even stating that flowers speak the words of God and will continue to speak after man's voice has diminished. Lucy helps Mattie to understand this by comparing her own words to God's words, telling her: 'my words die as soon as they are out of my mouth. [...] Well, the flowers are some of God's words, and they last longer than mine. [...] You must suppose them words in God's book, and try to read them and understand them' (*GC*, Chapter XXVIII, 'Mattie in the

Country', 203). Although initially puzzled by the meaning behind these words, Mattie eventually comes to appreciate the beauty of the flowers. MacDonald states:

[I]f she did not learn their meaning with her understanding, she must have learned it with her heart, for she would gaze at some of them in a way that showed plainly enough that she felt their beauty; and in the beauty, the individual loveliness of such things, lies the dim lesson with which they faintly tincture our being. No man can be quite the same he was after having *loved* a new flower. (*GC*, Chapter XXVIII, 'Mattie in the Country', 204)

This can be seen as an essential early step in Mattie's successful growth. Having been exposed to Nature in her visit to the countryside, her isolated view of the world is challenged, prompting her imagination to ponder things which point towards the divine.

Ultimately, MacDonald's primary concern throughout his writing deals with spirituality. For Mattie, her spiritual state has been weakened due to her confinement within Guild Court. One of the ways that Mattie reveals her spiritual malady is through *Syne*, the malevolent entity with whom she associates through her father's second-hand books. The name, *Syne*, reminds us of the spiritual concept of *sin*, which is a symbolic representation of man's separation from God. Mattie's delusions about the books also remind us of another young character who suffers in a similar fashion. In *David Elginbrod* (1863), Hugh Sutherland leaves Scotland for England where he is employed as a tutor to a boy named Harry. Despite his youth, Harry suffers from mental strain and fatigue. These symptoms appear to be associated with the romance of *Polexander*, an exceedingly long book which he continuously forces himself to read but is unable to finish (or at least to feel that he has finished it).¹⁷⁴ Detecting this, Hugh makes Harry promise not to touch the book again. Hugh also employs Harry in a little physical exertion and tells him stories to develop and strengthen his imagination. The root of Harry's illness lies in the fact that his intellectual growth has been neglected by his family. Although he is not confined to an overcrowded corner of London as is Mattie, he is still the victim of claustrophobia. In *Guild Court*, Lucy sets out to

¹⁷⁴ See *DE*, Chapter XVII, 'Harry's New Horse', pp. 100-1 and Chapter XIX, 'The Cave in the Straw', pp. 115-6.

help Mattie in a similar way that Hugh helps Harry. Assuming that Mattie's suffering is caused by her isolation within Guild Court and feeling that her childhood is being neglected, Lucy takes her on a holiday out of the city and reads to her from a volume of Wordsworth's poetry. Her efforts enable Mattie to break herself from her confinement and to fight against *Syne*.

As this example shows, MacDonald felt that encounters with Nature were needed for the physical well-being of children. As a result of spending adequate time in the countryside, 'Mattie's thought and feeling [sic] were drawn outward. Her health improved. Body and mind reacted on each other. She grew younger and humbler' (*GC*, Chapter XXVIII, 'Mattie in the Country', 204). Just as Nature made a lady of Margaret Elginbrod, making her even more attractive to the eyes of Hugh Sutherland, so in Mattie's case, it smoothed away the figurative wrinkles of premature adulthood.¹⁷⁵ However, Mattie is unable to receive the lessons from Nature without the help of Lucy (and, indirectly, Wordsworth). After experiencing Nature for herself, the child's intellect is inspired to seek after the origin of her thoughts which are, in turn, directed towards God. MacDonald concludes the scene by stating, 'Before she left Hastings, Mattie was almost a child' (*GC*, Chapter XXVIII, 'Mattie in the Country', 205).

This is a core point of MacDonald's theology, which implies that the journey towards God involves refining the individual soul and growing child-like, as opposed to remaining or becoming childish. Eventually, for one to fully face God, one must reach perfection—to be on equal terms with Christ. Thus, part of Mattie's experience contributes to her mental and emotional health but also aids her journey towards God's perfection. MacDonald is suggesting in this scene that God's original intention was for her to be a child, though due to the circumstances of her life, her childhood has been neglected. However, while seeking after God, she begins to

¹⁷⁵ See Nature's effect on Margaret in *DE*, Chapter IX, 'Nature', pp. 45-6 and Chapter LXX, 'Nature and Her Lady', pp. 449-50.

grow into the child he intended her to be. Such a spiritual progression confirms MacDonald's theory that one of Nature's lessons to humanity is to awaken thoughts within man that have as yet slumbered (*Orts*, 'The Fantastic Imagination', 319-20).

In his essay, 'Wordsworth's Poetry', MacDonald indicates that Wordsworth discovered and illustrated four significant stages of spiritual growth from his experience with Nature. In ascending order, MacDonald states that the first stage to be found in Nature is simply amusement; though the lowest stage in the grand scheme, simple amusement with an object such as a flower turns the attention of the individual upon the object itself—which may initiate a further and deeper search into its origins (*Orts*, 'Wordsworth's Poetry', 250).

Although it is the simplest and most child-like reaction to Nature, amusement may lead to the provision of joy, which then becomes the second stage of discovery and spiritual growth. MacDonald mentions Wordsworth's poem, 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' (1807), to illustrate that the power of joy is more potent than amusement and has a long-lasting effect upon the soul (*Orts*, 'Wordsworth's Poetry', 251). MacDonald clearly agreed with Wordsworth's opinion in this matter as can be seen in an example from *The Marquis of Lossie* (1877). After Alexander Graham leaves Scotland and moves to London, where he becomes an urban clergyman, much like Mr Blackstone in *The Vicar's Daughter* and Dr Christopher in *Weighed and Wanting*, he is reunited with his former student, Malcolm. Living in poverty with a heart longing for his home country, Graham refers to Wordsworth's poem while confessing to Malcolm that the memory of what he once felt and experienced in Nature, the 'outer things that have contributed to his inward growth', provide him with peace in the city. With confidence, he states:

The sights which, when I lie down to sleep, rise before that inward eye Wordsworth calls the bliss of solitude, have upon me power almost of a spiritual vision, so purely radiant are they of that which dwells in them, the divine thought which is their substance, their *hypostasis*. (*ML*, Chapter XXI, 'Mr Graham', 76)

Using Graham's speech to Malcolm, MacDonald establishes an existential point while revealing Wordsworthian inspiration: all existence shares a familial origin in the personhood of God. Though Graham longs to return to his Scottish past, the idea that his true home lies in a 'divine thought' provides him with his present confidence. Additionally, the heart of this idea is expressed in *Guild Court* during a scene when Lucy takes the girls on an outing to the zoo. Towards the end of their outing, Lucy explores the gardens and falls within a dreamy state. MacDonald powerfully illustrates the spiritual effect of Nature, stating:

There the buds were bursting everywhere. Out of the black bark, all begrimed with London smoke and London dirt, flowed the purest green. Verily there is One that can bring a clean thing out of an unclean. Reviving nature was all in harmony with Lucy's feelings this day. It was the most simply happy day she had ever had. (*GC*, Chapter LII, 'Lucy, and Mattie, and Poppie', 360-1)

The element of joy derived from Nature often comes with a deeper understanding, or perhaps simply a feeling of divine harmony, in MacDonald's characters.

However, as with amusement, this does not always prompt a genuine, spiritual search for truth. Instead, it is in the third stage that a lesson is learned from Nature. MacDonald provides an example of how Nature may affect and comfort a troubled mind when Lucy takes Mattie to an evening church service. The scene is carefully constructed to match Lucy's mood, which, at the time, is hurt and filled with sorrow. Whilst walking towards the church using a wide lane which she has only rarely traversed, Lucy begins to observe the contrasting effects of light and darkness within her surroundings. MacDonald writes that 'Long shadows lay or flitted about over the level street. Lucy had never before taken any notice of the long shadows of the evening' (*GC*, Chapter XX, 'How Lucy Spent the Night', 144). The mesmerised Lucy begins to search for their meaning as MacDonald adds: 'the reason she saw them now was that her sorrowful heart saw the sorrowfulness of the long shadows out of the rosy mist, and made her mind observe them. The sight brought the tears again into her eyes, and yet soothed her' (*GC*, Chapter XX, 'How Lucy

Spent the Night', 144). The scene takes a striking hold upon Lucy and she begins to feel the harmony and truth of suffering made clear through her knowledge of God in Nature. MacDonald adds later:

Even hither come the marvels of Nature's magic. Not all the commonplaces of ugly dwellings, and cheating shops that look churches in the face and are not ashamed, can shut out that which gives mystery to the glen far withdrawn, and loveliness to the mountain-side. From this moment Lucy began to see and feel things as she had never seen or felt them before. (*GC*, Chapter XX, 'How Lucy Spent the Night', 145)

With the fourth and final stage, MacDonald suggests that Nature 'puts a man into that mood or condition in which thoughts come of themselves' (*Orts*, 'Wordsworth's Poetry', 254). Alexander Graham, in *Malcolm*, believes in this idea and having met with Malcolm in a churchyard late one afternoon, after they had been conversing on the topic of death and spiritual resurrection, he persuades his pupil to remain alone in the churchyard for half an hour. Of Graham, MacDonald writes: 'For the master believed in solitude and silence. Say rather, he believed in God. What the youth might think, feel, or judge, he could not tell; but he believed that when the Human is still, the Divine speaks to it, because it is its own'.¹⁷⁶ Ever trusting his schoolmaster, Malcolm agrees to remain in the churchyard as night falls around him. Recalling Wordsworth's poem 'Composed upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty' (1820), as well as Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard* (1751), MacDonald writes:

The darkness had deepened, the graves all but vanished; an old setting moon appeared, boat-like over a great cloudy chasm, into which it slowly sank; blocks of cloud, with stars between, possessed the sky; all nature seemed thinking about death; a listless wind began to blow, and Malcolm began to feel as if he were awake too long, and *ought* to be asleep—as if he were out in a dream—a dead man that had risen too soon or lingered too late—so lonely, so forsaken! The wind, soft as it was, seemed to blow through his very soul. Yet something held him, and his half-hour was long over when he left the churchyard. (*Malcolm*, Chapter XII, 'The Churchyard', 67)

¹⁷⁶ George MacDonald, *Malcolm* (London: Henry S. King, 1875; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2004), Chapter XII, 'The Churchyard', p. 67.

Merging his personal theology with Wordsworth's ideas of an inherent harmony between man and Nature, MacDonald uses Graham's mystical instructions to Malcolm to represent his own belief that Nature brings man closer to God, claiming that this is the highest benefit that Nature can offer humanity. This theory is later echoed in MacDonald's essay, 'The Fantastic Imagination', where he states: 'The best Nature does for us is to work in us such moods in which thoughts of high import arise (*Orts*, 'The Fantastic Imagination', 319). Prompted by beauty, man is then encouraged to seek after God (*Orts*, 'Wordsworth's Poetry', 256). In the end, MacDonald claims that God uses Nature to draw humanity back to himself. This point is dramatically detailed in Mattie's spiritual conversion in the countryside near Hastings.

Throughout his writing, MacDonald consistently personifies Nature as the outward face of God. In *Guild Court*, this theory becomes a social ideal in itself, ever prompting man to seek its hidden truths. MacDonald theorises that once these truths are discovered, man should reveal them to his community and to help others become more like Christ; thus, by aiding another's spiritual growth, one becomes a fellow-worker with God.

CHAPTER FOUR

Animals

Introduction

Throughout George MacDonald's literary career, his affection for animals, their rights, and their welfare, is noticeable. Robert Lee Wolff claims: 'For all animals he developed affections far stronger than usual, even among Britons' (15). At first, the subject of animal welfare in MacDonald's writing may appear to be nothing more than an incessant quirk or, at most, an aspect of his involvement in politics. However, when the subject of animal welfare, as it was discussed in the nineteenth century, is viewed alongside MacDonald's theology, it becomes much more than a fad or a political statement.

There has yet to be an academic study dedicated to analysing the presence and meaning of animals within MacDonald fiction. Early discussions of MacDonald's work simply illustrate the peculiar, recurrent use of horses throughout his fiction.¹⁷⁷ Both Ronald and Greville MacDonald attest to their father's affection for horses. Ronald claims that his father held 'an almost passionate love of horses' (40-2). Likewise, Greville claims that his 'father's love of horses and intimacy with every creature he handled date back from his earliest childhood', and suggests that this peculiar reverence for all animal life was perhaps instilled in him by George MacDonald Senior (MacDonald's father), who, believing in the sanctity of animal life, opposed hunting (*GMDW*, 54). Indeed, the relationship between a character and his or her horse (or other domestic pet) in MacDonald's fiction markedly suggests that there may be some underlying meaning.

¹⁷⁷ See *GMDW*, pp. 54-5, and Joseph Johnson, *George MacDonald: A Bibliographical and Critical Appreciation* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman, 1906), pp. 212-5.

As yet, only Wolff has voiced an opinion on the presence of animals in MacDonald's fiction. He argues that MacDonald developed a dislike for humanity due to his love for animals, as exemplified in novels like *The Princess and Curdie* (1883) and *A Rough Shaking* (1891). Wolff claims that in these novels, 'beasts are better than the human beings' (314). Furthermore, he suggests: 'Among human beings [within MacDonald's fiction], only children are good, retaining their primal innocence' (315). But, Wolff's discussion of the animal in MacDonald's fiction is too brief; he merely uses it as a means of suggesting that MacDonald grew tired of society and his hopes for humanity took a pessimistic turn in his old age.

This chapter provides a different interpretation by making parallels between MacDonald's representation of animal care and animal spirituality. Indeed, MacDonald's love and reverence for horses was deeper than that of many of his contemporaries because he maintained a fundamental belief that horses, along with all other animals, possessed eternal souls. One of many examples of this idea can be found in his children's novel, *Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood* (1871), wherein the title character/narrator is discussing his father's horse, named Missy, modelled after MacDonald's own horse from his childhood.¹⁷⁸ The narrator claims:

My father was very fond of [Missy], and used to tell wonderful stories of her judgment and skill. I believe he was never quite without a hope that somehow or other he should find her again in the next world. At all events I am certain that it was hard for him to believe that so much wise affection should have been created to be again uncreated. I cannot say that I ever heard him give utterance to anything of the sort; but whence else should I have had such a firm conviction, dating from a period farther back than my memory can reach, that whatever might become of the other horses, Missy was sure to go to heaven? [...] I am wiser now, and extend the hope to the rest of the horses, for I cannot believe that the God who does nothing in vain ever creates in order to destroy.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ See GMDW, pp. 54-5, and Saintsbury, p. 18.

¹⁷⁹ George MacDonald, *Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood* (London: Strahan, 1871; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1999), Chapter XXIII, 'Knight-Errantry', pp. 203-4.

Indeed, MacDonald never wavered from this idea. Elizabeth Saintsbury suggests that this peculiar aspect of MacDonald's theology 'was based on his realisation that the nature of animals, indeed their very existence, had its origin in the creative love of God whose work is to preserve not to destroy' (135). She offers an example with a letter written by MacDonald to a friend, expressing condolences for the death of his friend's dog: 'I trust for him [the dog] it is only a fresh finding of himself—that delicate long nose of his was not given him for only such a few years as you have known him' ('Letter to an Unidentified Friend, 1870', in Saintsbury, 135).

Yet, MacDonald's insistence that animals continue to exist in an afterlife following their earthly deaths was a radical idea in the nineteenth century; so much so, that it was one of the key issues that cost him his first and only pulpit ministry. Troubled by his beliefs, the deacons of his Arundel church forced him into resignation.¹⁸⁰ Yet, this did nothing to quell MacDonald's beliefs. At some point in all of his novels, MacDonald suggests the possibility that animals, though they may suffer at the hands of humans, are loved by God who has endowed them with eternal souls and allow them to share eternity with him and the rest of his creation in heaven. Thus, MacDonald maintained a fervent belief that humans and animals share a familial bond; therefore, if a man harms (intentionally or unintentionally) any animal, it would be equivalent to his harming another man.

This was a fundamental belief for MacDonald and is best expressed in his 'animal sermon' entitled, 'The Hope for the Universe' (1892), where he claims that man has a moral obligation to seek and improve the welfare of animals. MacDonald argues:

To believe that God made many of the lower creatures merely for prey, or to be the slaves of a slave, and writhe under the tyrannies of a cruel master who will not serve his own master; that he created and is creating an endless succession of them to reap little or no good of life but its cessation—a doctrine held by some, and practically accepted by multitudes—is to believe in a God who, so far as one portion at least of his creation is

¹⁸⁰ See *GMDW*, pp. 177-8.

concerned, is a demon. But a creative demon is an absurdity; and were such a creator possible, he would not be God, but must one day be found and destroyed by the real God. Not the less the fact remains, that miserable suffering abounds among them, and that, even supposing God did not foresee how creation would turn out for them, the thing lies at his door. He has besides made them so far dumb that they cannot move the hearts of the oppressors into whose hands he has given them, telling how hard they find the world, how sore their life in it. The apostle takes up their case, and gives us material for an answer to such as blame God for their sad condition.¹⁸¹

Though MacDonald infuses his fiction with this theological argument, as well as publishing an earlier ‘animal sermon’ in the novel, *Paul Faber, Surgeon* (1879), his best ideas concerning man’s moral obligation to the animal kingdom are most clearly expressed here.

Indeed, MacDonald was sensitive to the sufferings humans inflicted upon animals, especially horses, as is revealed in an interesting story that Greville recounts in his biography. While discussing his family’s holiday at Bude during the summer of 1867, Greville recounts how, after travelling one day, the horses which had been carrying them in a wagon were too exhausted to carry them home, despite the driver’s urgings. Greville claims:

So my father took the reins, when, at one word from him and no touch of the whip, they blithely settled into their collars—another instance of the way creatures vied with one another, rich or poor, eloquent or dumb, in giving to this man [his father] what he needed: he was an hungered, and they gave him meat; a stranger, and they took him home. (*GMDW*, 369-70)

What makes Greville’s story particularly interesting is that he follows it by comparing his father’s actions to those of John Wesley and Father Ignatius, both of whom, he claims, had the uncanny ability to invigorate weary animals. No doubt, Greville is merely painting a saintly image of his father, but his story provides further evidence regarding the tenderness his father felt towards the suffering endured by animals.

In general, the social interest in animals and the affection for household pets during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries seems to be particularly British. It was a common feature for

¹⁸¹ George MacDonald, ‘The Hope of the Universe’ in *The Hope of the Gospel* (London: Ward, Lock, Bowden, 1892; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1995); cited as *HG*, pp. 190-224, pp. 193-4.

the sitter of a portrait to have his or her image represented or photographed with a pet. William Hogarth's self-portrait, *The Painter and His Pug* (1745), Henry Raeburn's famous *Portrait of Sir Walter Scott and His Dogs* (1819), and countless other examples attest to this phenomenon. Byron immortalised his pet dog with his 'Inscription on the Monument of a Newfoundland Dog' (1808). Although it may be argued that the image of the master and pet served as a signifier for regency, especially at the beginning of the period, it may also point to a genuine affection for the pet.

Most Victorians are especially known today for the devotion they had for their domestic pets and the idea of a pet being abused by its owner would have been met with disapproval. This was not the case, strictly speaking, for all Victorians. Recent discussion has shown that there were at least a few individuals, such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who were notorious for their lack of care for their domestic pets.¹⁸² Regardless, the greater part of Victorian society showed affection for pets and stories involving animals were popular. Similarly, fears of the family dog being abducted and handed over to a cruel vivisectionist would have done much to gain support for the antivivisectionist movement, which surfaced during the mid-1870s.

Despite Wolff's argument that MacDonald preferred animals to humans, he does admit that there appears to be some underlying motive on MacDonald's part regarding the subject of animal care. Though he does not offer it, Wolff recommends that an 'investigation' into MacDonald's attitude regarding animal suffering and spirituality should be commenced (408, note 25). This chapter is devoted to such an analysis and completes it in two parts. Part One looks at animal suffering and welfare, discussing the issues of vivisection, vegetarianism, hunting, and animal abuse and discipline as appearing in MacDonald's fiction. Part Two

¹⁸² For further discussion regarding Rossetti's treatment of animals, see Jodi-Anne George, 'Rossetti's Menagerie: The Condition of Animals in Victorian Britain', *Journal of the Scottish Society for Art History*, 17 (2012), pp. 19-23.

considers nineteenth-century fears of evolution and degeneration at the Victorian *fin de siècle* and their representations in MacDonald's theology, spiritual writings, and fiction.

Part One

Animal Care: Representations of Vivisection, Vegetarianism, Hunting, and Animal Discipline and Abuse

MacDonald and the Vivisection Debate

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, British writers began to pursue the question of animal spirituality and considered the moral dilemma of animal suffering. Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) was the first English social reformer of significance to probe this dilemma. The question for him was not whether animals possessed souls, but whether or not man was morally justified to inflict suffering on animals.¹⁸³ Furthermore, it was not uncommon for theologians to suggest that man had a moral obligation to look after the health of the animals. James Granger is remembered for having delivered the first sermon on this topic, entitled 'An Apology for the Brute Creation, or Abuse of Animals Censured' (1772). Later, John Wesley proposed the idea that animals would share an afterlife with man in his sermon, 'The General Deliverance' (1791). In the nineteenth century, Thomas Chalmers preached a sermon entitled 'On Cruelty to Animals' (1826), which suggested that man had a moral obligation to look after the health of the animals. John Henry Newman compared the sufferings of animals with the sufferings of Christ on Earth in his sermon, 'The Crucifixion' (1843). It seems fitting that

¹⁸³ See Rod Preece, ed., *Awe for Tiger, Love for the Lamb: A Chronicle of Sensibility to Animals* (Vancouver: UBC, 2002), pp. 178-9.

MacDonald should be placed alongside these theologians since he produced two ‘animal sermons’ as well (both of which are discussed at length below).

In addition to these theological and philosophical discussions, a type of animal literature emerged with the intention of representing man’s cruelty to animals. Although animals have been written as characters throughout literary history, especially fairy tales for children, they began to take on more political significance in the 1870s with novels such as Ouida’s (Maria Louise Ramé) *Puck* (1870) and Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty* (1877). One of the remarkable aspects of this type of novel is that the story is told from the perspective of an animal-narrator. MacDonald never wrote from an animal’s perspective, but he comes near to doing so with a conversation between two horses named Old Diamond and Ruby in *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871).¹⁸⁴

Another children’s novel, *A Rough Shaking*, offers more animal characters; yet, unlike *At the Back of the North Wind*, it is not a fantasy novel. Written in a similar manner to *Ranald Bannerman’s Boyhood*, the novel was actually intended for older adolescents and offers a depth of humanitarian concerns. The protagonist and hero of the tale is a young boy named Clare Skymer. In several ways, he is similar to the young hero in *At the Back of the North Wind*. Both characters are extremely optimistic and give the appearance of belonging to another world. Clare, on the other hand, forms a relationship with every animal he meets throughout the novel. He speaks and is spoken to by his animals; yet, his ability to communicate goes beyond verbal speech. He views his animals as he would members of his own family and communicates with them through love and understanding. As it now stands, *A Rough Shaking* is MacDonald’s greatest contribution to Victorian animal literature.

¹⁸⁴ See this conversation in *ABNW*, Chapter XXXII, ‘Diamond and Ruby’, pp. 315-21.

The book begins with an earthquake in a small Italian village where the young Clare is visiting with his family. Unfortunately, the earthquake kills his mother and separates him from his father. However, Clare is not orphaned for long, as an English couple finds him in the rubble of a church and basically adopts him on the spot. Heartache continues a few years later when Clare's adopted parents die and he is left to fend for himself in the world. His struggles force him to travel the countryside and his only companions are Tommy, a young thief, and Abdiel, a faithful and obedient dog. Almost all of the humans that Clare encounters on his journey treat him with cruelty. The animals, on the other hand, recognise and treat him as if he were their brother. Even fierce and potentially dangerous animals, such as the temperamental bull named Nimrod, and the travelling menagerie's puma, are soothed and tamed, even to the point of friendship, by Clare.

Clearly then, Clare is MacDonald's portrait of St Francis of Assisi (c.1181-1226), the thirteenth-century monk reputed to preach sermons to animals. Not only does Clare's attitude to the animal world share similarities to St Francis, but Clare's name brings attention to one of St Francis's most significant disciples. In the latter course of St Francis's ministry, a young lady of noble birth, named Chiara Offreduccio (1194-1253), wished to join his disciples. Her parents were opposed to her desire for poverty and Christian service. Forbidding her to join St Francis's monastery, they kept her locked within their estate. St Francis received word of Chiara's imprisonment and helped her to escape. Joining his disciples, Chiara became St Francis's protégée and remains in history as his female counterpart known as St Clare of Assisi.

What sets MacDonald's *A Rough Shaking* and other novels that have animals characters apart from other similar works such as *Black Beauty* and Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1897), is that MacDonald's animal characters are not anthropomorphised beings. Perhaps the only

characteristic linking MacDonald's work with other works of this sort is his impassioned ability to represent man's cruelty to animals.

In 1824, a society was formed to raise awareness of the mistreatment of animals, particularly horses. The organisation was aptly named the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and was later given Royal distinction in 1840. Although it was concerned with abuse directed to domestic animals, concerns with laboratory animals were seldom brought to the surface.¹⁸⁵ It was not until the 1870s that the subject of vivisection began to be fully scrutinised. The term, vivisection, is composed of the Latin words *vivus* (alive/living) and *sectio* (cutting/surgery), and remains today a controversial issue. In 1875, an antivivisection movement emerged and sought to challenge the legality of vivisection in Britain. The movement began, mostly, with a letter submitted to the editor of the *Morning Post*, revealing vivid descriptions of a laboratory used for vivisectioning dogs. What made the letter important was that it was not penned by a sensational journalist, but by a genuine man of science named George Hoggan, a young medical student who was under the supervision of Claude Bernard, a French physiologist famed for being one of the scientists practising vivisection in Europe. With Hoggan's letter, the Victorians found themselves faced with a new dilemma. Despite Britain's love for pets, the health of its public was governed and dependent upon animal experimentation and its leading scientists felt that it was necessary for advancing physiological science and the progress of modern medicine.¹⁸⁶ The issue was serious and MacDonald was greatly affected by it.

¹⁸⁵ For discussion regarding mid-nineteenth-century RSPCA policies and its approach to vivisection, see Richard D. French, *Antivivisection and Medical Science in Victorian Society* (Princeton and London: Princeton UP, 1975), pp. 27-35.

¹⁸⁶ For discussions regarding the subject of animal welfare and vivisection in the nineteenth century, see French; Preece, Chapter 8; Nicolaas A. Rupke, ed., *Vivisection in Historical Perspective* (London and New York: Routledge, 1987); and Richard D. Ryder, *Animal Revolution: Changing Attitudes towards Speciesism*, rev edn (Oxford: Berg, 2000), pp. 103-16.

Hoggan had only completed four months of his work before withdrawing from Bernard's training, unable to bear any longer the vivisections he was required to perform. In his letter, Hoggan states that the vivisections were utterly pointless: 'not one of those experiments on animals was justified or necessary'.¹⁸⁷ 'The idea of the good of humanity', he confesses, 'was simply out of the question, and would be laughed at, the great aim being to keep up with, or get ahead of, one's contemporaries in science, even at the price of an incalculable amount of torture needlessly and iniquitously inflicted on the poor animals' (in Preece, 311). The emotional rhetoric of Hoggan's letter is heightened with descriptions of the various vivisections, of the dogs' frightened awareness, and their painful reactions to their dilemma. Hoggan's main critique is the lack of pity shown by the physiologists and the inhumane manner with which they worked; instead of intellectuals, he represents them as sadists. He writes that the dogs, after being brought into the laboratory, 'would make friendly advances to each of the three or four persons present, and as far as eyes, ears, and tail could make mute appeal for mercy eloquent, they tried it in vain' (in Preece, 311). 'Hundreds of times,' Hoggan claims, 'when an animal writhed with pain and thereby deranged the tissues, during a delicate dissection, instead of being soothed it would receive a slap and an angry order to be quiet and behave itself' (in Preece, 312).

Due to his vivid portrait of the vivisectionist at work in his laboratory as well as the 'mute appeals' of the helpless victims, Hoggan's letter did much to strengthen the antivivisection movement. Richard D. French states: 'Of all medical testimony against vivisection, before or since, George Hoggan's letter had the greatest impact' (68). Never in his writings did MacDonald refer directly to Hoggan's letter, but he makes several indirect parallels to its imagery in his fictional sermon, 'The Groans of the Inarticulate' (discussed at length below) in *Paul Faber, Surgeon*, which suggests his knowledge of it. These are shown with MacDonald's

¹⁸⁷ George Hoggan, 'Letter to the Editor', *Morning Post*, (2 February 1875), reprinted in Preece, pp. 310-12, p. 311.

literary description of the bound and helpless dog and the vivisectionist at work, who suddenly looks up to see Christ observing the bloody experiment. MacDonald writes:

[P]icture to yourselves one of these Christian inquirers erect before his class of students: knife in hand, he is demonstrating to them from the live animal, so fixed and screwed and wired that he cannot find for his agony even the poor relief of a yelp, how this or that writhing nerve or twitching muscle operates in the business of a life which his demonstration has turned from the gift of love into a poisoned curse; picture to yourself such a one so busied, suddenly raising his eyes and seeing the eyes that see him! the eyes of Him who, when He hung upon the cross, knew that He suffered for the whole creation of His Father, to lift it out of darkness into light, out of wallowing chaos into order and peace! Those eyes watching him, that pierced hand soothing his victim, would not the knife fall from his hand in the divine paralysis that shoots from the heart and conscience?¹⁸⁸

The only difference here is the presence of Christ and his effect on the vivisectionist. Though Hoggan refrains from using religious rhetoric in his letter, his action of turning away from his studies and exposing the truths about vivisection confirm his change of heart, much like the change that MacDonald illustrates in his fictional sermon.

After publishing his letter in the *Morning Post*, Hoggan joined forces with Frances Power Cobbe, the leading advocate for the antivivisection movement, and Toni Doran to help raise public awareness regarding animal cruelty. Alongside other like-minded humanitarians, they formed the Victoria Street Society in 1875 and carried out investigations on the practice of vivisection.¹⁸⁹ The society was also known as the Society for the Protection of Animals Liable to Vivisection and was later renamed the National Anti-Vivisection Society in 1897. Within a year, their report was strong enough to lead to the enactment of the ‘Cruelty to Animals Act of 1876’. However, the act merely regulated the practice of vivisection; it did nothing to eliminate it, much to the great disappointment of Cobbe. Vivisection was still allowed to be practised under certain

¹⁸⁸ *Paul Faber, Surgeon* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1879; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1998); cited as *PFS*, Chapter XXVII, ‘The Groans of the Inarticulate’, p. 178.

¹⁸⁹ For further discussion regarding the formation, history, and key members/officers of the Victoria Street Society, see French, pp. 85-9 and Sally Mitchell, *Frances Power Cobbe: Victorian Feminist, Journalist, Reformer* (Charlottesville and London: U of Virginia P, 2004), pp. 240-2.

conditions and penalties could be given for any regulation breaches. This led to much criticism throughout the latter part of the 1870s and voices of opposition continued to preach the horrors of the vivisected animal throughout the rest of the century.

In the early 1880s, Oxford became the primary seat of the vivisection debate. Meetings were held among the faculty, revealing a finely drawn split in opinions. Key opponents of vivisection were two of MacDonald's closest friends, Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) and John Ruskin. Interestingly, one of the key individuals in favour of vivisection was Henry George Liddell, Dean of Christ Church and father of Alice Liddell, Dodgson's young child friend for whom he wrote *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). Four months after Hoggan's letter was published, Dodgson expressed his views on the subject with an antivivisectionist pamphlet entitled, 'Some Popular Fallacies about Vivisection' (1875). Dodgson concludes his pamphlet with the suggestion that vivisection *will* one day turn against man and that man, himself, will be the victim. Dodgson writes:

And when that day shall come, O my brother-man, you who claim for yourself and for me so proud an ancestry—tracing our pedigree through the anthropomorphoid ape up to the primeval zoophyte—what potent spell have *you* in store to win exemption from the common doom? Will you represent to that grim spectre, as he gloats over you, scalpel in hand, the inalienable rights of man? He will tell you that this is merely a question of relative expediency,—that, with so feeble a physique as yours, you have only to be thankful that natural selection has spared you so long. Will you reproach him with the needless torture he proposes to inflict upon you? He will smilingly assure you that the *hyperæsthesia*, which he hopes to induce, is in itself a most interesting phenomenon, deserving much patient study. Will you then, gathering up all your strength for one last desperate appeal, plead with him as with a fellow-man, and with an agonized cry for 'Mercy!' seek to rouse some dormant spark of pity in that icy breast? Ask it rather of the nether mill-stone.¹⁹⁰

Not only does Dodgson's pamphlet provide a broader picture of how vivisection was interpreted by non-scientists, it also does much to suggest the academic fervour that was currently emerging in Oxford and erupted a few years later with a hotly-contested debate.

¹⁹⁰ Charles Dodgson, 'Some Popular Fallacies about Vivisection', *Fortnightly Review*, 23 (June 1875), pp. 847-54, p. 854.

In 1882, the University of Oxford appointed John Burden-Sanderson as Professor of Physiology and financed his laboratory in 1884, granting him rights to practice vivisection at the university. This decision not only marked the end of the debate at Oxford but it also marked the end of Ruskin's appointment, who, in protest at the university's stance, resigned from his position as Slade Professor of Fine Art. Unfortunately, Ruskin's resignation did little, if anything, to raise the significant attention he had hoped. Due to an alleged decline in mental stability, revealed throughout his *Fors Clavigera* (1871-84), Ruskin's impact as a critical voice had already begun to decrease.

Surprisingly, Charles Darwin's voice was often conflicted; though he abhorred the practice of vivisection, he also felt that its continuation was necessary. For Darwin, the very idea of inflicting pain upon an animal was contemptible. Writing to a friend, Darwin confesses: 'You ask about my opinion on vivisection. I quite agree that it is justifiable for real investigations on physiology; but not for mere damnable and detestable curiosity. It is a subject which makes me sick with horror, so I will not say another word about it, else I shall not sleep tonight' ('Letter to Ray Lankester, 22 March 1871', in Francis Darwin, 288). Yet, despite his evident nausea, Darwin thought that the progress of science depended upon such sacrifices. An example of this conflict is illustrated ten years later in a letter to a Swedish physiologist. In his letter, Darwin writes that despite being 'a strong advocate for humanity to animals,' he nevertheless feels with the 'deepest conviction that he who retards the progress of physiology commits a crime against mankind' ('Letter to Frithiof Holmgren, 14 April 1881', in Francis Darwin, 289). Darwin's conflict was genuine and captured the feelings of others who might have also approved the practice of vivisection.

Though the antivivisection movement raised national awareness of the plight of the laboratory animal, and helped to bring about the enactment of the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1876, the overall debate reached political closure with the University of Oxford's appointing and funding Burden-Sanderson's rights to practise vivisection in the mid-1880s.

However, despite the failed attempt to prohibit vivisection in Britain, there still remained strong antivivisection feelings of revulsion that were printed as 'antivivisection literature'. Such literature was popular throughout the 1880s until the start of the First World War. Numerous poets and novelists who were sensitive to questions dealing with animal suffering lifted their pens against what they felt was an atrocity against Nature. Alfred Tennyson accepted Frances Power Cobbe's invitation for him to serve as the Vice-President of the Victoria Street Society and published 'In the Children's Hospital' (1880), a poem representing the image of a surgeon as a cruel and bloodthirsty vivisectionist who would 'mangle the living dog that had loved him and fawned at his knee'.¹⁹¹ Likewise, Robert Browning, who also served as a Vice-President to the Victoria Street Society, wrote two poems about the subject of vivisection. The first poem is 'Tray' (from *Dramatic Idyls*, 1879), which depicts how a dog saves the life of a girl from drowning, only to be rewarded with the prospect of being vivisected. In 'Arcades Ambo' (from *Asolando: Fancies and Facts*, 1889), Browning sees vivisection as an act of man's cowardice. In a letter to Cobbe, Browning claims:

You have heard, 'I take an equal interest with yourself in the effort to suppress vivisection.' I dare not so honour my mere wishes and prayers as to put them for a moment beside your noble acts; but this I know, I would rather submit to the worst of deaths, so far as pain goes, than have a single dog or cat tortured on the pretence of sparing me a twinge or two.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Alfred Tennyson, 'In the Children's Hospital' in *The Poems Of Tennyson*, ed. by Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, 1969), pp. 1262-3, p. 1262, line 9.

¹⁹² 'Letter to Frances Power Cobbe, 28 December 1874', in Edward Berdoo, *Browning's Message to His Time: His Religion, Philosophy, and Science* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1890), p. 215.

Browning concludes his letter with the claim that whoever should refuse to sign the petition to end the act of vivisection in Britain would no longer be counted as his friend (Berdoe, 215). Dickens (though he died before the debate on vivisection began) gave explicit details of animal experimentation in his essay, 'Inhumane Humanity', in *All the Year Round* (1866). His essay, which is wholly scathing in its rhetoric, concludes with the words: 'Man may be justified—though I doubt it—in torturing the beasts, that he himself may escape pain; but he certainly has no right to gratify an idle and purposeless curiosity through the practice of cruelty'.¹⁹³

MacDonald joined these writers and became an avid supporter of the antivivisection movement with the publication of his novel, *Paul Faber, Surgeon*. Greville MacDonald reports that his father's sentiments remained in 'entire sympathy' with the Anti-Vivisection Society (*Rems*, 215). Additionally, Greville claims that he himself was asked by his father's friend, William Cowper-Temple (Lord Mount-Temple), to become secretary for the Anti-Vivisection Society (*Rems*, 215).¹⁹⁴

MacDonald republished his fictional animal sermon, 'The Groans of the Inarticulate', from *Paul Faber, Surgeon* as an antivivisectionist tract. The sermon is delivered by Thomas Wingfold, a character who is also present in *Thomas Wingfold, Curate* (1876) and *There and Back* (1891) from the *Wingfold* trilogy. The topic of animal care remained a sensitive subject for the remainder of MacDonald's literary career, and, in the 1890s he produced two significant works to exemplify his feelings on the subject: *A Rough Shaking* and 'The Hope of the Universe', a sermon designed specifically to address animal spirituality and welfare. Both works

¹⁹³ Charles Dickens, 'Inhumane Humanity' in *All the Year Round*, 7 (17 March 1866), pp. 238-40, p. 240. As well, see his 'Cat Stories' in *All the Year Round*, 7 (7 June 1862), pp. 308-12, and 'Dog Shows' in *All the Year Round*, 7 (2 August 1862), pp. 493-7. Though neither essay is an attack on animal experimentation, both, at least, expresses the attitude that Dickens had for animals.

¹⁹⁴ However, Greville MacDonald, being a medical practitioner, had mixed feelings concerning the issue and, thus, refused William Cowper-Temple's offer.

serve as a companion piece for each other and highlight the horrors of vivisection while also discussing the spiritual harm caused by the pampering of domestic pets, which MacDonald believed to be a greater evil.

MacDonald's *Paul Faber, Surgeon* is significant because it is one of the earliest examples of antivivisection feelings given in a novel. Unfortunately, this work has fallen into obscurity. The only other novel in the 1870s that discussed the topic of vivisection was Elpis Melena's (Marie-Espérance von Schwartz) *Gemma, or Virtue and Vice* (also published in 1879). However, Melena used the topic of vivisection as a literary Gothic ploy: the novel presents a group of Occultists who practise vivisection as a form of ritual killing. In contrast, MacDonald presented the subject of vivisection as a political act to raise his readers' awareness of the issue and to gain support for the antivivisection movement.

Other writers followed Melena's example and sensationalised the subject of vivisection in their novels. Perhaps the best-known writers to do so were H.G. Wells and Wilkie Collins. In Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), the protagonist, Edward Prendick, finds himself stranded on an island owned by a doctor named Moreau. Prendick remembers hearing tales of the doctor back in England, where he was once exposed as an active vivisectionist on dogs. In order to flee the scandal, Moreau took residence on a deserted island. During his time on Moreau's island, Prendick faces the grim reality that Moreau has been *shaping* animals into human-like beings by means of vivisection. However, the inner, animal instinct of Moreau's beast men conflicts with their newly established human frames and tries to make them revert back to being animals. Eventually, Moreau is killed during a conflict with one of his beast men and Prendick is left alone on the island with the remaining creatures, all of whom revert back to

their original animal way of living (walking on all fours, hunting other animals for food, etc.). Over time, Prendick finds a way to leave the island and returns to human society.

Novels such as *The Island of Doctor Moreau* suggest that after the political vivisection debate came to an end, it was adopted by Gothic novelists who kept the topic alive. Though Wilkie Collins's 'antivivisection novel', *Heart and Science* (1883), is not a proper Gothic novel, it, like all other antivivisection pieces of writing, sensationalises the topic of vivisection and verbalises society's fear that humans could potentially fall victims to vivisectionists as Charles Dodgson expressed earlier in his antivivisectionist pamphlet, 'Some Fallacies about Vivisection' (1854). The novel presents two brothers, one of whom is a vivisectionist. During a conversation about the problems and controversy of vivisection one evening, the vivisectionist advocate, Nathaniel Benjulia, confesses his thirst for knowledge, which he claims to be the god whom he worships.¹⁹⁵ He extends his confession, revealing his desire to have a live human subject. Benjulia claims: 'The old anatomist stole dead bodies for Knowledge. In that sacred cause, if I could steal a living man without being found out, I would tie him on my table, and grasp my grand discovery in days, instead of months' (Collins, 170). Yet, Collins does not totally present Benjulia as an inhuman monster to be feared. Concluding his rant, Benjulia confesses the tumultuous feelings he once felt whilst vivisecting a monkey. The source of his turmoil was the result of him comparing the monkey to a child. Benjulia claims that, as a result, the experiment horrified him and he claims:

I would have given the world to put him out of his misery. But I went on. In the glorious cause I went on. My hands turned cold—my heart ached—I thought of a child I sometimes played with—I suffered—I resisted—I went on. All for Knowledge! all for Knowledge! (170)

¹⁹⁵ Wilkie Collins, *Heart and Science: A Story of the Present Time*, new edn (London: Chatto & Windus, 1884), p. 170.

Collins's point is this, despite the repulsion Benjulia felt, since his attraction to knowledge was so irresistible that he could not refrain from carrying out the vivisection, what hope could there be for a real human child who might be the secret door to discovery and fame? Fortunately, Benjulia never gets the chance; he commits suicide after being thwarted by an antivivisectionist group.

Following this, Marie Corelli, in her novel, *The Master-Christian* (1900), promotes a similar fear by suggesting that vivisection will be the fate for hospital patients who are thought to be on the point of dying.¹⁹⁶ Yet, the best example which contributed to this new fear was Barry Pain's novel, *The Octave of Claudius* (1897).¹⁹⁷ The novel tells the story of Claudius Sandell, an ill-fortuned young man who meets a seemingly benevolent surgeon named Dr Gabriel Lamb. The surgeon strikes a bargain with Claudius, giving him eight thousand pounds and eight days to spend the funds however he wishes, on condition that, after the eight days are up, he must submit himself to the doctor's work. Unbeknown to Claudius, Dr Lamb's mysterious 'experiment' is to surgically alter him into an ape-man. Grateful for the doctor's kindness and desiring to aid his mission to benefit the world, Claudius agrees and returns eight days later to fulfil his obligation. Fortunately, before the experiment begins, Dr Lamb is intercepted and killed by his own wife, who wishes to save Claudius from such a horrific fate. Likewise, in *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Prendick fears that he, too, will be a victim of Moreau's experiments. Yet, Prendick discovers a much greater and deeper fear and he is sickened with what he finds after he returns to London. In the final chapter, Prendick confesses:

I could not persuade myself that the men and women I met were not also another Beast People, animals half wrought into the outward image of human souls, and that they would presently begin to revert,—to show first this bestial mark and then that. [...] Then I look about me at my fellow-men; and I go in fear. [...] I feel as though the animal was surging

¹⁹⁶ Marie Corelli, *The Master-Christian* (London: Methuen, 1900), p. 137.

¹⁹⁷ Barry Pain, *The Octave of Claudius* (London and New York: Harper and Bros, 1897).

up through them; that presently the degradation of the Islanders will be played over again on a larger scale.¹⁹⁸

With Prendick's confession, Wells summarises the fear of human degeneration as marked by *fin de siècle* Gothic fiction. As well, Wells is suggesting that man need not fear mentally unstable medical practitioners or vivisectionists, for the beast lying dormant within the heart of man surfaces as he becomes more inhospitable to his fellow humans.

Another idea that suggests the possibility of man's reversion back to an animal state is expressed in MacDonald's fantasy novel, *The Princess and Curdie*, when the king's enemies are bound and sent into the 'animal's country'. The idea is also expressed in *Lilith*. In this novel, the title character has the supernatural ability to anthropomorphise herself into a feline creature, which represents her cunning and predatory nature. Wells read and admired *Lilith* and wrote to MacDonald, praising, particularly, his idea and expression of the seven dimensions. In his letter, Wells writes, 'Your polarization and mirror business struck me as neat in the extreme' ('Letter to George MacDonald, 24 September 1895', in *Rems*, 323). He then proceeds to compare *Lilith* with one of his own books, *The Wonderful Visit* (1895), promising to send MacDonald a copy. It seems surprising that Wells does not mention MacDonald's technique for depicting human regression and degeneracy in *Lilith*, which is a significant factor in both *The Time Machine* (1895) and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*.

Overall, the one defining difference that sets MacDonald's discussion of vivisection apart from other literary works with similar themes is his fundamental meaning. He did not sensationalise the topic of vivisection as a means to market *Paul Faber, Surgeon*. For him, the topic of vivisection became a moral question. Additionally, MacDonald purposefully riddled his fiction with episodes suggesting that animals possess both spirituality and intelligence and we

¹⁹⁸ H.G. Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau: A Possibility* (New York: Stone & Kimball, 1896), pp. 245-6.

can deduce the extent of his feelings on the subject from these fictional accounts. At one point, MacDonald was asked for an interview about these feelings. Always reluctant to be interviewed, MacDonald firmly refused, stating:

I could not consent to send abroad my opinions through another, and especially by means of the Newspapers. What I have written you have a right to use as you see fit, but I cannot have anything to do with what you say about it. ('Letter to an Unidentified Woman, 5 November 1893', in Sadler, 358)

Wary of having his voice muddled by another's hands, MacDonald, in another letter, defends his motives for doing so. He writes: 'I can't do it [...]. I never have and never will consent to be interviewed. I will do *nothing* to bring my personality before the public in any way farther than my work in itself necessitates' ('Letter to A.P. Watt, 11 June 1893', in *GMDW*, 542). However, despite MacDonald's refusal to be interviewed on the subject, he does reveal a strongly held belief:

I quite sympathize with your desire to see justice done to our brothers and sisters in lower kind. I do not think much can be done, however, save by helping men and women, and especially children, to see into the life and feeling and thought of animals, so as to recognize their real being. And I think the worst enemies of the lower animals are those that instead of teaching and raising them, spoil and pamper them, as doubtless they would children, if they had them, until they are a nuisance. ('Letter to an Unidentified Woman, 5 November 1893', in Sadler, 358)

While MacDonald confesses his belief that political action might be futile, he indicates that the issue of 'their real being' continues to remain one of spiritual importance and that education to 'see into the life and feeling and thought of animals' must never cease. Nevertheless, had MacDonald consented to give newspaper interviews instead of merely relying on what he wrote in private letters and published works to express his thoughts on animal experimentation, he could possibly have been ranked today as an important activist and nineteenth-century writer on social issues.

MacDonald's comparison between the plight of the vivisected animal and that of the pampered domestic pet is interesting; though the animal used for scientific experimentation suffers physical pain, the pampered animal suffers spiritual consequences. He appears to suggest that vivisection might be a lesser evil and that pampering at the seemingly loving hands of a doting owner might be a form of abuse. In this regard, the victimised pet becomes spiritually corrupt.

Cradled in the middle of *Paul Faber, Surgeon*, as mentioned above, MacDonald presents his first treatise against vivisection in the form of an impressively-named sermon entitled, 'The Groans of the Inarticulate'. Robert Lee Wolff claims that MacDonald always regarded *Paul Faber, Surgeon* as his best work (302). However, Wolff remains unconvinced that the novel should have been regarded so highly and does not offer us MacDonald's reason for thinking so well of it. The novel contains a sermon against vivisection and this might be a clue as to why MacDonald held it in such high regard. At the height of the vivisection debate, MacDonald saw his opportunity to make a difference by actively contributing to the reformation of modern science. While novels written prior to *Paul Faber, Surgeon* affirmed MacDonald's spiritual theories on the nature of God and man, with this novel he felt that he was able to speak for the sake of the lower animals in a manner that did not require fantasy or allegory.

What is striking about *Paul Faber, Surgeon* is MacDonald's presentation of an atheist who, within the framework of the novel, does not convert to Christianity, at least not in a conventional, religious manner. Paul is dedicated to the pursuit of modern science but his dedication to science is upheld by his idealism. Like Victor Frankenstein, Paul maintains a fervent desire to empty the natural world of pain, suffering, and even death. MacDonald reveals Paul's ideology when the character muses:

were it not for sickness, age, and death, this world of ours would be no bad place to live in. Surely mine is the most needful and the noblest of callings!—to fight for youth, and health, and love, against age, and sickness, and decay! to fight death to the last, even knowing he must have the best of it in the end! to set law against law, and do what poor thing may be done to reconcile the inexorable with the desirable! [...] Ah, what a dreamer I should have been, had I lived in the time when great dreams were possible! (*PFS*, Chapter XV, ‘The Parlor at Owlkirk’, 85-6)

Such dreams are not criticised in this novel; in fact, MacDonald appears to justify and support Paul’s scientific idealism, perhaps comparing him to Dr Anderson in *Robert Falconer* and Harry Armstrong in *Adela Cathcart* (1864), both of whom are Christian doctors who treat the soul and the body as one component.

MacDonald defends Paul’s atheism much as he did Shelley’s.¹⁹⁹ Because Paul is obedient to the search for truth in his service to others, MacDonald ranks him much higher than he does other characters bound simply by religious obligation. Of Paul’s humanism, MacDonald writes:

If he was more helpful to his fellows than they [religious people who think little of God’s will], he fared better; for actions in themselves good, however imperfect the motives that give rise to them, react blissfully upon character and nature. It is better to be an atheist who does the will of God, than a so-called Christian who does not. (*PFS*, Chapter V, ‘The Road to Owlkirk’, 24)

In addition to MacDonald’s narrative defence, similar words are also spoken by Thomas Wingfold, the wise curate and central figure within the *Wingfold* trilogy. Thomas, having struggled with similar questions of faith in *Thomas Wingfold, Curate*, attempts to gain the trust and friendship of Paul throughout the novel. He understands Paul’s abhorrence for religion and feels that friendship is the best way in which he may connect with him. While speaking of Paul’s philosophy to another character, Thomas claims: ‘The atheism of some men [...] is a nobler thing than the Christianity of some of the foremost of so-called and so-believed Christians, and I may not doubt they will fare better at the last’ (*PFS*, Chapter XVIII, ‘The Park at Nestley’, 113-4).

¹⁹⁹ See MacDonald’s essay, ‘Shelley’, in *Orts*, pp. 264-81, pp. 271-2.

As a character, Thomas does more than simply espouse MacDonald's defence of atheism but it is through Thomas that MacDonald publishes his first sermon against the practice of vivisection. Towards the middle of the novel, Paul accepts the assistance of a medical student. One day, when Paul returns to his medical laboratory after performing his daily rounds, he discovers the young assistant in the act of vivisectioning a dog. Enraged, Paul argues with the man and throws him out of the studio. The torture-stricken dog flees the studio as well, despite Paul's attempts to recapture it so that he might treat its wounds. Several members of the town witness the event but, due to their disapproval of the doctor's atheism, they accuse Paul as the vivisectionist and see the assistant as the innocent student who had resigned from his position. Fortunately, Thomas is one of the witnesses at the scene and defends Paul during his sermon at church the following Sunday.

Thomas's sermon, entitled 'The Groans of the Inarticulate', may easily be one of MacDonald's greatest achievements in rhetoric. MacDonald directs his readers' attention to Thomas's personal feelings about the issue by writing, 'he felt as if the pulse of all creation were beating in unison with his own; for today he was the speaker for the speechless, the interpreter of groans to the creation of God' (*PFS*, Chapter XXVII, 'The Groans of the Inarticulate', 171-2). Thomas not only sees himself as the liaison between men and animals, but he also sees himself as *one* with the animals whom he views as the 'lower brethren' of mankind. The sermon immediately begins with a discourse on the nature of God's care for his creation before moving on to describe St Paul's love for all living things. Thomas then makes a direct attack on the modern Christian, claiming that the modern Christian has isolated himself from God's creation and considers himself to be the rightful governor of the lower animals. Thomas proclaims:

I count it as belonging to the smallest of our faith, to the poorness of our religion, to the rudimentary condition of our nature, that our sympathy with God's creatures is so small. Whatever the narrowness of our poverty-stricken, threadbare theories concerning them,

whatever the inhospitality and exclusiveness of our mean pride toward them, we can not [sic] escape admitting that to them pain is pain, and comfort is comfort; that they hunger and thirst; that sleep restores and death delivers them: surely these are ground enough to the true heart wherefore it should love and cherish them—the heart at least that believes with St. Paul, that they need and have the salvation of Christ as well as we. Right grievously, though blindly, do they groan after it. (*PFS*, Chapter XXVII, ‘The Groans of the Inarticulate’, 173)

He continues to affirm in the sermon that it is a mistake to imagine that animals are spiritually unconnected to God and man. Furthermore, he asserts that neither the Bible nor scientific research offers an answer to whether animals possess souls. He does, however, confess his personal desire to believe that they do have souls.

In addition, Thomas hints at evolutionary theory when he states:

I know nothing, therefore care little, as to whether or not it may have pleased God to bring man up to the hill of humanity through the swamps and thickets of lower animal nature, but I do care that I should not now any more approach that level, whether once rightly my own or not. (*PFS*, Chapter XXVII, ‘The Groans of the Inarticulate’, 175)

Though Thomas claims that he is unconcerned with the theory of evolution, he does attest that it has a spiritual meaning and suggests that degenerative growth may exist and, if so, would be the proper ‘punishment, perhaps redemption, in store for some men and women’ (*PFS*, Chapter XXVII, ‘The Groans of the Inarticulate’, 175).²⁰⁰

Soon afterwards, Thomas addresses the practice of animal experimentation for the sake of medicinal progress. He feels that such progress as this is futile, proclaiming: ‘May God give me grace to prefer a hundred deaths to a life gained by the suffering of one simplest creature’ (*PFS*, Chapter XXVII, ‘The Groans of the Inarticulate’, 177). He clearly indicates that it should be counted as a sin to selfishly prolong a human life by the means of animal suffering. This idea alone reveals MacDonald’s approach to modern medicine. Thomas asks his congregation:

God in heaven! who, what is the man who would dare live a life wrung from the agonies of tortured innocents? Against the will of my Maker, live by means that are an abhorrence to His soul! Such a life must be all in the flesh! the spirit could have little

²⁰⁰ We will explore this concept in greater detail below.

share therein. Could it be even a life of the flesh that came of treason committed against essential animality [sic]? It could be but an abnormal monstrous existence, that sprang, toadstool-like, from the blood-marsh of cruelty—a life neither spiritual nor fleshey [sic], but devilish. (*PFS*, Chapter XXVII, ‘The Groans of the Inarticulate’, 177)

Thomas’s argument is that medical progress, when gained via animal experimentation, only serves to oppose God’s plan for humanity’s life. Thus, MacDonald suggests that those who wilfully choose physical comforts derived from the agonies of animals become enemies to God and his creation.

Following this point, MacDonald writes that this does not mean animals should not serve humanity. MacDonald believes that humans are spiritually higher than animals. Thus, animals are provided by God to serve humanity. Thomas states this theory as well, claiming:

It is true [sic] we are above the creatures—but not to keep them down; they are for our use and service, but neither to be trodden under the foot of pride, nor misused as ministers, at their worst cost of suffering, to our inordinate desires of ease. After no such fashion did God give them to be our helpers in living. To be tortured that we might gather ease! none but a devil could have made them for that! (*PFS*, Chapter XXVII, ‘The Groans of the Inarticulate’, 177-8)

Indeed, MacDonald’s rhetoric is potent with vivid pathos.

Moving from vivisection, MacDonald turns the sermon towards a spiritual form of abuse: the pampering and spoiling of domestic animals. This issue recurs in other novels and is discussed at greater length further below. In his sermon, Thomas confesses the disgust he feels when he sees animals spoiled by their owners. He states: ‘I confess that it moves with strange discomfort one who has looked upon swarms of motherless children, to see in a childless house a ruined dog, overfed, and snarling with discomfort even on the blessed throne of childhood, the lap of a woman’ (*PFS*, Chapter XXVII, ‘The Groans of the Inarticulate’, 179). Such pampering, MacDonald theorises, hinders the spiritual evolution of the dog and can ‘delay the poor animal in its slow trot towards canine perfection’ (*PFS*, Chapter XXVII, ‘The Groans of the Inarticulate’, 179).

MacDonald must have felt, even then, however, that his fictional sermon would fall upon closed ears. This is revealed in the way he depicts the congregational response. One character, Mrs Ramshorn, a minor antagonist in both *Thomas Wingfold, Curate* and *Paul Faber, Surgeon*, reacts as the voice of opposition:

What right had he to desecrate a pulpit of the Church of England by misusing it for the publication of his foolish fancies about creatures that had not reason! Of course nobody would think of being cruel to them, poor things! But there was that silly man talking about them as if they were better Christians than any of them! He was intruding into things he had not seen, vainly puffed up by fleshly mind. (*PFS*, Chapter XXVII, ‘The Groans of the Inarticulate’, 181)

Mrs Ramshorn’s reaction mirrors those that MacDonald possibly received from his Arundel congregation. As well, Ramshorn’s critique demonstrates her belief that the physical and spiritual worlds are unconnected and bear little consequence to each other. MacDonald felt that such a belief maintains not only a commonplace religion but a commonplace world.

Yet, MacDonald continued to fight against the Ramshorns of society by inserting various passages about animal care within his fiction. However, it was not until the publication of *The Hope of the Gospel* that he produced another sermon to combat the practice of vivisection.

In his sermon, ‘The Hope of the Universe’, MacDonald once again attempted to be the voice of the inarticulate. MacDonald prefaces his sermon with the biblical verse: ‘For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God’ (Romans 8.19). This verse is then used to demonstrate St Paul’s plea that the duty for humans to provide animal care is spiritually founded. Throughout the first portion of the sermon, MacDonald reveals his belief that animals possess souls, arguing with his fellow Christians who feel otherwise. MacDonald writes:

Would those Christians have me believe in a God who differentiates creatures from himself, only that they may be the prey of other creatures, or spend a few hours or years, helpless and lonely, speechless and without appeal, in merciless hands, then pass away into nothingness? I will not; in the name of Jesus, I will not. Had he not known

something better, would he have said what he did about the father of men and the sparrows? (*HG*, 'The Hope of the Universe', 196)

Although MacDonald does much to articulate his disappointment in the mistreatment of animals, his greater concern in this sermon is to initiate discussion regarding animal spirituality and divine evolution. His ultimate claim is that all living things ascend towards a higher life. This is simply a reworking of Darwin's theory of natural selection, emphasising spiritual progression over the natural. MacDonald exemplifies this by writing:

If I have myself gone through each of the typical forms of lower life on my way to the human—a supposition by antenatal history rendered probable—and therefore may have passed through any number of individual forms of life, I do not see why each of the lower animals should not as well pass upward through a succession of bettering embodiments. (*HG*, 'The Hope of the Universe', 200-1)

MacDonald then continues to construct his theory of evolution by demonstrating that the consequence for those individuals opposing the 'great human-divine idea', which is the will of God, is that they must regress back to a lower form: 'say of fish or insect or reptile, beyond which their moral nature has refused to advance' (*HG*, 'The Hope of the Universe', 201).

As with his sermon in *Paul Faber, Surgeon*, MacDonald once again affirms his belief that pampering an animal is actually more detrimental to the creature's spiritual state than physical torture. MacDonald writes that the lady who pampers her dog 'stunts his moral and intellectual development by unwise indulgence' (*HG*, 'The Hope of the Universe', 218).

The latter part of the sermon is dedicated to putting an end to the practice of vivisection. MacDonald applies powerful rhetoric in his final plea for the rights of the animal, stating:

It is the old story: the greed of knowing casts out righteousness, and mercy, and faith. Whatever benefited a benefit may or may not thus be wrought for higher creatures, the injustice to the lower is nowise affected. Justice has no respect of persons, but they are surely the weaker that stand more in need of justice! (*HG*, 'The Hope of the Universe', 219)

Following his discussion of what it means to have a life sustained in health through the torturous experimentation of science, MacDonald pronounces a prophetic curse upon the vivisectionists. He writes:

Not a few who now regard themselves as benefactors of mankind, will one day be looked upon with a disapprobation which no argument will now convince them they deserve. But yet another day is coming, when they will themselves right sorrowfully pour out disapprobation upon their own deeds, for they are not stones but men, and must repent. Let them, in the interests of humanity, give their own entrails to the knife, their own silver cord to be laid bare, their own golden bowl to be watched throbbing, and I will worship at their feet. (*HG*, 'The Hope of the Universe', 223)

The bitterness revealed in MacDonald's expression represents his despair over the vivisection debate. Though he concludes his sermon with the words, 'The Lord is mindful of his own, and will save both man and beast', it remains noticeable that MacDonald must have thought that little action could be given to reform the animal cruelty laws during the remainder of his lifetime.

It is interesting that MacDonald's 'vivisection sermon' should begin with a discourse on antivivisection and then turn to the pampering of domestic animals, which is then claimed to be a greater evil. Overall, both this and the fictional sermon, 'The Groans of the Inarticulate', demonstrate the fullness of MacDonald's passion for animal welfare.

Vegetarianism in *Paul Faber, Surgeon* and 'The Golden Key'

Another area of conflict within MacDonald's approach to animal rights is his feelings towards vegetarianism. The whole subject of MacDonald and vegetarianism has never before been addressed, but it seems appropriate to consider it here. Despite MacDonald's fervent attitude to animal rights and welfare, he was *not* a vegetarian. This is strange. In the nineteenth century, the fight for animal rights and the promotion of vegetarianism proceeded hand in hand. The same argument could also be said of the two today. Though most twenty-first-century vegetarians choose to be vegetarian for health or environmental reasons, many nineteenth-

century vegetarians chose to be vegetarians for spiritual reasons. For them, using animals as food created a moral dilemma, and in 1847, the Vegetarian Society was formed.²⁰¹ Colin Spencer claims that vegetarianism, for the Victorians, was synonymous with issues like ‘socialism, animal welfare, non-violence, pacifism, health and homeopathy’ (294). Individuals, such as Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, Robert Browning, William and Georgiana Cowper-Temple, all of whom were revered by MacDonald, were politically-engaged vegetarians and some were animal rights activists; yet, the issue of slaughtering animals for food rarely seemed to conjure any negative feelings in MacDonald. Throughout MacDonald’s writing, only a few instances may be found that offer light upon his attitude to the subject.

A small but important example concerns Mr Drake, a secondary character from *Paul Faber, Surgeon*, who discovers an unexpected advantage when he turns to vegetarianism out of necessity. In the novel, Drake is depicted as an emotionally depressed character due to his financial debt which renders him unable to pay his bills. However, Drake soon becomes inspired by the biblical tale of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (more commonly referred to by their Chaldean names: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego), and discontinues his habit of purchasing costly meat. He begins to dine solely upon beans, which he finds to be considerably cheaper. Of Drake’s new dietary result, MacDonald writes that not only was his financial depression relieved but that ‘instead of sleeping, as his custom was, after dinner, he was able to read without drowsiness’ (*PFS*, Chapter XVI, ‘The Butcher’s Shop’, 93). MacDonald is suggesting that the absence of meat restores both mental and physical alertness. One must note, however, that

²⁰¹ For thorough discussions on the history of the vegetarian movement in Victorian Britain and the formation of the Vegetarian Society, see Colin Spencer, *The Heretic’s Feast: A History of Vegetarianism* (London: Fourth Estate, 1993), pp. 252-94, and James Gregory, *Of Victorians and Vegetarians: The Vegetarian Movement in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), pp. 21-68.

Drake's vegetarianism is a product of his financial situation; no justification is given to show that Drake feels morally compelled to refrain from consuming animal meat.

Despite MacDonald's example from *Paul Faber, Surgeon* that abstinence from animal meat can be both physically and financially advantageous, no evidence suggests that MacDonald's family considered vegetarianism, even during their financial difficulties. The reason, perhaps, is given within the fairy tale, 'The Golden Key'. First published in *Dealings with the Fairies* (1867), 'The Golden Key' is a cryptic, yet remarkable, tale that is full of imagination, telling the story of two young protagonists named Mossy and Tangle, who are journeying to 'the country from which the shadows fall'. During an early scene, Tangle falls under the care of a mysterious lady, named 'Grandmother', who employs a flying fish to assist her in her mysterious work. In fact, the flying fish leads Tangle to the Grandmother's cottage.

What is especially unique about this strange tale is that as soon as the fish guides Tangle to the Grandmother's cottage, it immediately flies into a pot of boiling water. At first, Tangle is too surprised by the Grandmother's otherworldly beauty to be concerned about the fish's action. Yet later, when the Grandmother serves her the boiled fish for dinner, Tangle is both astonished and pained. The Grandmother understands Tangle's hesitation but tells her: 'You do not like to eat the messenger that brought you home. But it is the kindest return you can make. The creature was afraid to go until it saw me put the pot on, and heard me promise it should be boiled the moment it returned with you. Then it darted out of the door at once'.²⁰² To further explain the fish's motive, the Grandmother adds: 'In Fairyland, [...] the ambition of the animals is to be eaten by the people; for that is their highest end in that condition. But they are not therefore destroyed. Out of that pot comes something more than the dead fish, you will see' ('The Golden

²⁰² George MacDonald, 'The Golden Key' in *The Complete Fairy Tales*, ed. by U.C. Knoepfelmacher (New York: Penguin), pp. 120-44, p. 127.

Key', 127). Satisfied, Tangle then begins to dine upon the fish, finding it delightful. More importantly, as soon as Tangle swallows the first bite, she becomes receptive to the voices of all the animals in the surrounding forest. Instead of hearing merely animal sounds, their speech becomes intelligible to her. When their meal is over, the Grandmother returns to the pot in which the fish was boiled, uncovers it, and out springs a strange creature. MacDonald describes it as 'A lovely little creature in human shape, with large white wings' and later calls it an 'aëranth' ('The Golden Key', 128 and 134). MacDonald appears to be describing a spiritual state of evolution for the fish that follows its ability to sacrifice itself for Tangle. This is also an act of obedience to the Grandmother's wish. The lady gives it a new mission and it immediately leaves the cottage to fulfil its purpose. Asking the young girl if she felt that harm came to the fish, Tangle proclaims: 'I should not mind eating one every day' ('The Golden Key', 128). Later, she overhears the Grandmother employ another fish on an errand, promising it the reward of being eaten upon its return.

Mimicking the Grandmother's words, Alexander Graham, the wise schoolmaster in *Malcolm* (1875), offers his pupils the same lesson. This is revealed in the novel when Malcolm is sitting with Lady Florimel one evening. As they enjoy the sunset, they begin to discuss the battle of Armageddon, a symbolic battle discussed in the biblical book of Revelation. Malcolm, a fisherman by trade and Graham's pupil, compares the symbolic battle with the catching of fish. Malcolm tells Florimel:

He [Graham] says 'at the whole economy o' natur is fashiont unco like that o' the kingdom o' haven: its jist a gradation o' services, an' the highest en' o' ony animal is to contreebute to the life o' ane higher than itsel'; sae that it's the gran' preevilege o' the fish we tak, to be aten by human bein's, an' uphaud what's abune them. (*Malcolm*, Chapter XXIII, 'Armageddon', 135)

Malcolm is trying to express the idea that inferior life supports the life of the superior. Shortly afterwards, Malcolm discusses how the fish/animals help one to fight either for or against God,

depending on the heart of the individual. Thus, rebellion is a product of selfish desire to save one's life by avoiding honourable sacrifice.

With these overtly symbolic episodes, MacDonald actually justifies the action of slaughtering animals for food even though it seems that he fails to see that in the food market, as in the practice of vivisection, animals are killed for the sake of human survival. Presumably, the difference is that in vivisection, surgery is inflicted upon the living animal, while a slaughtered animal is killed as efficiently as possible. What would seem to be a blatant example of inconsistency in MacDonald's opposition towards vivisection is used here as a lesson to demonstrate his ideas about the spiritual evolutionary process. At the core of his religious writings in *Unspoken Sermons* as well as other examples located throughout his novels, MacDonald persistently declares that all living things are striving for more life.²⁰³ What is being strived for, as the example from *Malcolm* illustrates, depends upon the heart of the individual; one is either moving up the scale of creation towards perfection in Christ, or one is moving downwards, further into the animals' country, usually by seeking *self*-fulfilment and independence apart from Christ. MacDonald's theory of evolution is discussed at greater length below; however, at this point, it must be stressed that, for MacDonald, whole-hearted obedience (not to be confused with blind submission) to the will of God ensures spiritual harmony.

MacDonald demonstrates his theory with the example of the fish's obedience to the Grandmother and its transformation through the boiling water in 'The Golden Key'. Several points must be addressed. First, MacDonald draws our immediate attention to the setting. When the Grandmother explains why the messenger fish swam into the boiling pot, she specifies that it is the ambition *in Fairyland*. However, MacDonald's Fairyland is simply a refracted version of

²⁰³ See Donal's proclamation of this idea in *Donal Grant* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1883; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1998), Chapter I, 'Foot-Faring', pp. 5-6 as well as Arctura's acceptance in Chapter LXXX, 'Away-Faring', pp. 378.

the real world. Thus, according to MacDonald, the world of Fairyland must be depicted as obeying the same laws as the world of the real. Such depictions are probed in MacDonald's essay, 'The Fantastic Imagination', where he declares: 'In physical things a man may invent; in moral things he must obey—and take their laws with him into his invented world as well' (*Orts*, 'The Fantastic Imagination', 316). Second, MacDonald believes that animals are placed physically and spiritually below humans on an evolutionary scale. Thus, they sacrifice themselves to humans, serving humanity's physical needs by becoming food. It is then the responsibility of the humans to accept the animals' sacrifice and eat them. This act of obedience harmonises both parties under the will of God.

The Ethics of Hunting in *What's Mine's Mine*

As the latter-day Victorians were faced with the dilemma of saving laboratory animals from fates that could potentially advance modern science, so were they faced with the ethical dilemma of hunting, especially trophy hunting. The history of hunting reaches back to ancient times and does not require further discussion here. What is important, instead, is its relevance to MacDonald and its meaning in his fiction. MacDonald, during his childhood, witnessed the changing face of Scotland as independent farms were purchased by wealthy landowners and the land was developed into Victorian hunting estates for the British upper classes and newly rich. Yet, though the sport of hunting was a gentleman's hobby, there was a certain hint of barbarity attached to it.

Several British Romantic writers considered this idea and represented a negative view of hunting by highlighting its consequences for the prey. Several of Robert Burns's poems do this such as 'Song—Composed in August' (1783), 'Brigs of Ayr' (1786), 'On Scaring Some Water-

Fowl in Loch Turit' (1787), and 'On Seeing a Wounded Hare Limp by Me which a Fellow had just Shot' (1789). Other examples that are equally strong can be found with Shelley's treatise, 'A Vindication of a Natural Diet' (1812) and 'The Revolt of Islam' (1818). Crowning the list of thoughtless animal killers is Coleridge's mariner who kills the albatross on a whim, the act which alters his life forever.

Though Greville mentions that his father once made up part of a cub-hunting party with Mark Sharman (Louisa MacDonald's uncle) at Wellingborough in 1863, no other sources suggest that hunting was a common (or even rare for that matter) pastime for MacDonald (GMDW, 345). It may be that MacDonald shared his father's dislike for hunting. But, although MacDonald would have held similar views about hunting with Burns and other like-minded Romantics, there seems to be a slight difference with the manner in which he depicts hunting in his fiction.

Of the novels that represent scenes and discussions of hunting, *What's Mine's Mine* (1886) is the most significant. The novel, as was discussed in the previous chapter, tells the story of two brothers, Alister and Ian. Alister is chieftain of Clan Macruadh and his character is marred by pride. Ian, on the other hand, is without flaw and is cast in a similar mode as Robert Falconer, Malcolm MacPhail, or Gibbie Galbraith. Due to financial hardships, their clan begins to deteriorate as families leave the Highlands and relocate to North America. In addition, wealthy landowners from outside their clan purchase the land, turning what was once Macruadh farmland into private forests for game hunters. One of the central episodes in the novel's plot involves the killing of *An Cabrach Mòr*, a giant red stag and symbol of the Clan Macruadh. This, and other similar events, symbolises the declining status and power of the clan. Eventually, Alister and Ian decide to relocate the clan to Canada, where their people will have hope for a better way of life.

Although Alister strives to be as good as his brother Ian, he is challenged by the thought of obedient sacrifice to God. His devotion to the clan is strong and his affection for the Highlands is deep; however, his love has devolved into pride and becomes his greatest flaw. In addition to the love for his heritage, Alister has a remarkable character trait which is exhibited by his fervent love for animals. MacDonald writes that, though his fellow Highlanders have a passion for hunting, Alister chooses not to participate. Describing Alister's dichotomy, MacDonald writes:

He loved the deer so much, saw them so much a part of the glory of mountain and sky, sunshine and storm, that he liked to see them living, not dead, and only now and then shot one, when the family had need of it. He felt himself indeed almost the father of the deer as well as of his clan, and mourned greatly that he could do so little now, from the limited range of his property, to protect them. His love for live creatures was not quite equal to that of St. Francis, for he had not conceived the thought of turning wolf or fox from the error of his ways; but even the creatures that preyed upon others he killed only from a sense of duty, and with no pleasure in their death. The heartlessness of the common type of sportsman was loathsome to him. (*WMM*, Chapter VII, 'Mother and Son', 43-4)

With this dichotomy, MacDonald explores several key points regarding the human/animal social structure and the necessity to hunt.

First, MacDonald makes a clear point when he justifies Alister's reason for hunting. He only kills for the sake of his family. As mentioned above, MacDonald viewed animals as beneath humans in the social order of life. Animals serve humanity via sacrifice. Trophy hunting, however, is seen by MacDonald as senseless; since it does not constitute sacrifice on the animal's part, but murder. C.S. Lewis mentions that MacDonald's father disapproved of hunting, stating that 'he objected to grouse shooting on the score of cruelty and had in general a tenderness for animals not very usual among farmers more than a hundred years ago' (11). His father's views, as well as those expressed by Burns, would surely have influenced the young MacDonald's perception of hunting.

Second, Alister and Ian do shoot and kill predators, such as foxes; yet, even these killings are justified in the novel as an obligation which they owe to the other creatures. This is also an act of animal discipline, which is explored in the following section. Interestingly, MacDonald adds that Alister, despite his love and reverence for all living things, is not yet like St Francis of Assisi. Ian, on the other hand, justifies the ethical killing of certain animals as a service to humanity. In an earlier chapter, Ian recounts an experience he once had whilst hunting wolves in Russia. Ian suggests that the wolves represent a spiritual danger to the world, claiming: ‘They are the out-of-door devils of that country, and I fancy devils go into them sometimes, as they did once into the poor swine: they are the terror of all who live near the forests’ (*WMM*, Chapter XIV, ‘The Wolves’, 100). Ian’s comparison to the swine is a biblical tale about Christ healing a possessed man from a ‘legion’ of demons. According to the story, the demons fled the man and entered a group of swine, which then ran themselves into the sea and drowned (Mark 5.1-13).²⁰⁴

The comparison goes further with Ian’s description of the wolf-hunt. He confesses:

To kill one of them, if it be but one, is to do something for your kind. And just at that time I was oppressed with the feeling that I had done and was doing nothing for my people—my own humans; and not knowing anything else I could at the moment attempt, I resolved to go and kill a wolf or two: they had killed a poor woman only two nights before. (*WMM*, Chapter XIV, ‘The Wolves’, 101)

Ian describes how he safely positioned himself in a tree and killed so many wolves that he eventually ran out of ammunition. Afterwards, he fell asleep in the tree, despite the howling pack of wolves waiting for him at its base and MacDonald makes his point strikingly apparent. Whilst asleep in the tree, Ian has a re-occurring dream about a young girl who is penned up in a tree surrounded by hungry wolves. In his dream, Ian knows that the girl represents his own soul and the wolves represent the sin of his life; yet, despite its nightmarish imagery, Ian feels in his dream that he is swallowed up by the universe, which he interprets to be God.

²⁰⁴ Ian returns to this comparison on pp. 103-4.

MacDonald makes other spiritual comparisons with the animals and the hunting of animals in the novel with ‘Hector of the Stags’ and ‘Rob of the Angels’, two minor characters that MacDonald uses to symbolise the rightful position of man’s dominion over animals. Both Hector and Rob are fascinating characters. Hector is a deaf and mute Highlander, whereas his son, Rob, is one of MacDonald’s recurring ‘divine-idiot’ characters, possibly based upon Wordsworth’s ‘The Idiot Boy’ (1798).²⁰⁵ Hector and Rob are homeless; they wander the Strathruadh and live off the land. MacDonald writes that as a consequence of their way of life, they are seen as poachers. Yet, MacDonald defends their manner of survival by declaring that ‘they lived by the creatures which God scatters on his hills for his humans’ (*WMM*, Chapter XIX, ‘Rob of the Angels’, 141). The image here is reminiscent of the Grandmother’s fishes in ‘The Golden Key’. Like Alister, the pair ‘never stalked a deer, never killed anything, for mere sport. [...] What they wanted for food, they would kill; but it was not much they needed’ (*WMM*, Chapter XIX, ‘Rob of the Angels’, 142). Using them, MacDonald constructed an idea of what he felt was the rightful action of hunting.

Two other characters, Peregrine Palmer and Hilary Sercombe, represent the opposite of Hector and Rob. Palmer is, for MacDonald, simply an exaggerated representation of a *mammon*-worshipper. Having attained wealth with the success of his brewery, Palmer relocates his family to the region of Strathruadh and becomes primarily responsible for buying up the farmland and developing it as a privatised hunting forest. Sercombe, like Palmer, is a typical villain in MacDonald’s work: cunning, self-righteous, and a worshipper of *mammon*. MacDonald describes him thus:

He knew nothing of the first business of life—self-restraint, had never denied himself anything, and but for social influences would, in manhood as infancy, have obeyed every impulse. He was one of the merest slaves in the universe, a slave in his very essence, for

²⁰⁵ For brief discussions of the ‘divine-idiot’ in MacDonald’s fiction, see Wolff, pp. 284-5, and Reis, p. 70.

he counted wrong to others freedom for himself, and the rejection of the laws of his own being, liberty. (*WMM*, Chapter XXIV, ‘An Cabrach Mòr’, 179)

Shortly after this, MacDonald adds: ‘From such a man every true nature shrinks with involuntary recoil, and a sick sense of the inhuman’ (*WMM*, Chapter XXIV, ‘An Cabrach Mòr’, 179). Indeed, Sercombe is the antithesis of Alister. As well, Sercombe is responsible for the most significant event in the novel’s plot: the staged killing of *An Cabrach Mòr*.

Preparing to return to London, Sercombe devises a plan to stalk and kill the famed stag. MacDonald likens his yearning to kill the stag as a type of satanic bloodlust. In his strongest attack upon hunting, MacDonald writes:

To despoil him [the stag] of his life, his glorious rush over the mountain side, his plunge into the valley, and fierce strain up the opposing hill; to see that ideal of strength, suppleness, and joyous flight, lie nerveless and flaccid at his feet; to be able to call the thicket-like antlers of the splendid animal his own, was for the time the one ambition of Hilary Sercombe; for he was of the brood of Mephistopheles, the child of darkness, whose delight lies in undoing what God has done—the nearest that any evil power can come to creating. (*WMM*, Chapter XXIV, ‘An Cabrach Mòr’, 180)

Over a few successive nights, Sercombe finally manages to locate and kill the stag, but not without Hector and Rob’s notice. Hearing Sercombe’s gunshot, they quickly find him gloating over his prize. Maintaining the satanic metaphor, MacDonald writes: ‘No lord of creation, but an enemy of life, stood regarding his work, a tumbled heap of death, yet saying to himself, like God when he made the world, “It is good”’ (*WMM*, Chapter XXIV, ‘An Cabrach Mòr’, 183).

Despite MacDonald’s obvious dislike of hunting, the episode of the stag is meant to serve a higher purpose. Instead of Sercombe being penalised for poaching, Ian persuades Alister to send the head of the clan’s stag to Sercombe as a prize. This is where the real difficulty lies for it targets Alister’s pride. Alister is aware of the implication of his brother’s challenge and, after much heartache, complies. He only does so, however, because of a conversation that he had with Ian a few days prior to the stag’s death. The subject of their discussion was Christ’s

commandment: ‘Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also’ (Matthew 5.39). Ian tries to explain that the only way for anyone to understand how to actually *turn the other cheek* lies simply with doing it (*WMM*, Chapter XXV, ‘The Stag’s Head’, 189). After a long internal struggle with himself, Alister realises: ‘This may be just the sort of thing Jesus meant! Even if I be in the right, I have a right to yield my right—and to *him* [Christ] I will yield it’ (*WMM*, Chapter XXV, ‘The Stag’s Head’, 190). MacDonald writes after Alister resolves to send the head of *An Cabrach Mòr* to Sercombe:

Thereupon rushed into his heart the joy of giving up, of deliverance from self; and pity, to leaven his contempt, awoke for Sercombe. No sooner had he yielded his pride, than he felt it possible to love the man—not for anything he was, but for what he might and must be. (*WMM*, Chapter XXV, ‘The Stag’s Head’, 190)

This event marks an emotional and spiritual turning point for Alister. What becomes of more significance with MacDonald is the need to conquer the *self* by submitting to sacrifice, which is the ultimate theme in the aptly titled *What’s Mine’s Mine*. Just as MacDonald believes that hunted animals become the necessary sacrifice for humanity’s physical well-being, so does *An Cabrach Mòr* become a sacrifice for Alister’s pride.

Animal Discipline and Abuse in MacDonald’s Novels

The topic of animal discipline in MacDonald’s fiction may appear troubling at first due to its portrayal of violence. MacDonald is never one to shy away from violence within his fiction. Initially, Robert Lee Wolff noticed the persistent presence of violence towards humans, but fails to notice the violence towards animals (which is more frequent) in MacDonald’s work, theorising that he was a sadist (306-14). Wolff’s theory of MacDonald’s sadistic tendency within his fiction compels us towards further investigation regarding animals. However, Wolff does not seem to offer any guidance on why MacDonald exhibits this tendency. It is essential to

remember that MacDonald interpreted the physical and figurative act of suffering as a necessary part of man's physical and spiritual growth. Thus, as human characters in MacDonald's fiction must suffer in order to spiritually progress, so must his animal characters suffer.

Although animal abuse was not a major issue in the public sphere (at least in the same way that vivisection and vegetarianism were *issues*), and, in fact, would not become a major issue until the twentieth century, MacDonald was already showing concern with the treatment of domestic animals in his fiction, making him a man that was slightly ahead of his time. His fiction abounds with episodes that involve an animal (horses mostly) which is tormented by a cruel master and the consequences of its having to suffer unjustly. Additionally, there are some examples in his fiction which appear to point to a theological idea and suggest that certain masters are obliged to effectively discipline the animals under their care as an act of spiritual service.

MacDonald demonstrates that, like humans, animals are either progressing or regressing on their journey towards perfection in Christ. The most obvious and well-known example of this theory appears in *The Princess and Curdie* (1883). In the novel, readers are presented with an allegory that demonstrates this theory. The novel forms a sequel to *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) and tells the story of Curdie Peterson, a young miner. Princess Irene is present, but she has left her home for Gwyntystorm to tend to her ailing father. As it turns out, the king is being slowly overthrown by a few members of his staff, namely Dr Kelman and the Lord Chamberlain, who are poisoning him. Curdie's adventures begin when he is summoned by Irene's fairy grandmother, who commissions him to travel to Gwyntystorm and save the kingdom, which he does.

To aid Curdie's quest, the grandmother gives Curdie a mystical power: by touching the hand of any person he meets, Curdie is able to tell whether or not that person is growing into a beast. This also applies to animals. As well, the grandmother gives Curdie a strange companion named Lina, who is a curious mixture of dog, cat, snake, and other strange oddities. Yet, Curdie, whilst holding her paw in his hand, feels the soft hand of a gentle child. Despite her beastly façade, Lina is growing into a lady. During his travels, Curdie meets other creatures that are, like Lina, strange oddities of nature. MacDonald calls them the 'Uglies'. They (and Lina) were once human, but have degenerated to their current state. However, by working for the good of others (thus aiding Curdie's quest), they are able to rescale the chain of evolution with the hope of attaining human form once more.

There are similar instances of animal discipline in the non-fantasy novels. In fact, for readers sensitive to animal abuse, works such as *Alec Forbes of Howglen* and *The Marquis of Lossie* offer questionable scenes where domesticated animals are beaten. Just as there are good and bad characters, so are there good and bad pets. Likewise, as MacDonald often presents the growth of a Christian hero in his fiction, so does he sometimes presents the spiritual growth of an animal. Convinced that animals share eternity with humans and God, it only seemed natural to MacDonald that, like humans, animals are fallible and require proper spiritual discipline. Thus, he provided various episodes in his novels wherein an ideal Christian hero attempts to guide a wayward animal back to God.

The best example of this is provided with Malcolm MacPhail's desire to discipline Kelpie, the temperamental and dangerous mare in *The Marquis of Lossie*. The novel forms a sequel to *Malcolm*, where the title character is introduced as a fisherman with a remarkable intellect; Kelpie is also present, but her disciplining does not begin until the sequel. By the end of

Malcolm, Malcolm discovers that he is the lost son and heir of the Marquis of Lossie. The sequel picks up where the first book leaves off. Malcolm, who keeps his true identity a secret, travels to London to serve as a groom to his sister, Florimel. Whilst in London, he instructs that Kelpie be shipped to him from Scotland so that he might continue to train her. As well, he fears that Kelpie, if left alone for too long, without opportunities for discipline, will be seen as too great a danger to humans and will be killed. Kelpie is presented as not only temperamental, but also conniving and physically dangerous to others. Her wicked nature is the sign of her spiritual condition, which, due to her having been spoiled by her former master, has led her into a state of moral corruption. Despite warnings from other characters that she has lost her sense of reason and ought to be killed, Malcolm feels spiritually obligated to take her under his command and discipline her violent actions.

At one point in the novel, Malcolm is riding Kelpie along Rotten Row in Hyde Park when she begins to become unruly; Malcolm, who had fashioned special spurs for the purpose, begins to use them on her. During the course of this scene, a female onlooker attempts to intervene for the mare and tries, unsuccessfully, to shame Malcolm for his manner of handling the creature. Unashamed indeed, Malcolm reassures her that such treatment is for the mare's own good, claiming: 'so long as my mare is not able to be a law to herself, I must be a law to her' (*ML*, Chapter XXIV, 'A Lady', 95).²⁰⁶

Malcolm's words precede those that MacDonald gives later in his sermon, 'The Hope of the Universe'. In his sermon, MacDonald argues:

Torture can be inflicted only by the superior. The divine idea of a superior, is one who requires duty, and protects, helps, delivers: our relation to the animals is that of their superiors in the family, who require labour, it may be, but are just, helpful, protective. Can they know anything of the Father who neither love nor rule their inferiors, but use

²⁰⁶ This is repeated later when Malcolm tells the same female (Clementina) that 'the higher nature has the right to rule the lower in righteousness' (*ML*, Chapter XXXIX, 'Discipline', p. 168).

them as a child his insensate toys, pulling them to pieces to know what is inside them? Such men, so-called of science—let them have the dignity to the fullness of its worth—lust to know as if a man's life lay in knowing, as if it were a vile thing to be ignorant—so vile that, for the sake of his secret hoard of facts, they do right in breaking with torture into the house of the innocent! Surely they shall not thus find the way of understanding! Surely there is a maniac thirst for knowledge, as a maniac thirst for wine or for blood! He who loves knowledge the most genuinely, will with the most patience wait for it until it can be had righteously. (*HG*, 'The Hope of the Universe', 219-20)

Although MacDonald, in the sermon, is attacking the vivisection issue, the root of the idea is found in *The Marquis of Lossie*, namely, with his challenging the nineteenth-century dogmatic belief that man has *dominion* over animals.

Eventually, Malcolm is the only individual that Kelpie will permit on her back and, throughout the course of the novel, her inner turmoil is soothed. Although Malcolm's struggle with the mare is gruelling, MacDonald uses it to illustrate the struggle between man and God. At one point in the novel, Malcolm hears another character state that horses ought to be treated like humans (*ML*, Chapter XXII, 'Richmond Park', 83).²⁰⁷ Speaking to Florimel of this idea, Malcolm confesses: 'I've often fancied, within the last few months, that God does with some people something like as I do with Kelpie' (*ML*, Chapter XXII, 'Richmond Park', 86).

The greatest apology which MacDonald offers for Malcolm's behaviour towards Kelpie is given during a discussion between Malcolm and Clementina. Musing over the problem of pain and suffering, Malcolm speaks of Christ's death agonies, stating:

Now I ask whether that grandest thing, crowning his [Christ's] life, the yielding of it to the hand of violence, he had not learned also from his Father. Was his death the only thing he had not so learned? If I am right, and I do not say *if* in doubt, then the suffering of those three terrible hours was a type of the suffering of the Father himself in bringing sons and daughters through the cleansing and glorifying fires, without which the created cannot be made the very children of God, partakers of the divine nature and peace. Then from the lowest, weakest tone of suffering, up to the loftiest pitch, the divinest [sic] acme of pain, there is not one pang to which the sensorium of the universe does not respond; never an untuneful vibration of nerve or spirit but thrills beyond the brain or the heart of the sufferer to the brain, the heart of the universe; and God, in the simplest, most literal,

²⁰⁷ As well, see this discussion repeated in *ML*, Chapter XXIII, 'Painter and Groom', p. 88.

fullest sense, and not by sympathy alone, suffers *with* his creatures. (*ML*, Chapter XLII, 'St Ronan's Well', 192-3)

Further discussion ensues and Malcolm closes their talk by adding: '[animals] suffer less than we, because they scarcely think of the past, and not at all of the future. It is the same with children, [...]. To get back something of this privilege of theirs, we have to be obedient and take no thought for the morrow' (*ML*, Chapter XLII, 'St Ronan's Well', 194). Not only does MacDonald justify the reason for suffering, but he also argues that suffering is an act of spiritual refinement which connects all living things to God.

MacDonald returns to this argument in *What's Mine's Mine*. Early in the novel, two young ladies, Christina and Mercy (Peregrine's daughters), come upon Alister ploughing his field. The activity would not have captured their attention except that Alister appears to be having trouble from his oxen. The ladies approach Alister and Christina probes the question of animal labour, comparing it to human slavery. Alister claims that humans have a spiritual obligation to make animals labour, stating:

At all events, if we do not, we must either kill them off by degrees, or cede them this world, and emigrate. But even that would be a bad thing for my little bulls there! It is not so many years since the last wolf was killed—here, close by! and if the dogs turned to wolves again, where would they be? The domestic animals would then have wild beasts instead of men for their masters! To have the world a habitable one, man must rule. (*WMM*, Chapter X, 'The Plough-Bulls', 69)

With Alister's reply, MacDonald suggests that undisciplined animals would be responsible for the spiritual regression of other animals. MacDonald concludes the scene by claiming:

There are tender-hearted people who virtually object to the whole scheme of creation; they would neither have force used nor pain suffered; they talk as if kindness could do everything, even where it is not felt. Millions of human beings but for suffering would never develop an atom of affection. The man who would spare *due* suffering is not wise. It is folly to conclude a thing ought not to be done because it hurts. There are powers to be born, creations to be perfected, sinners to be redeemed, through the ministry of pain, that could be born, perfected, redeemed, in no other way. (*WMM*, Chapter X, 'The Plough-Bulls', 71-2)

This ‘ministry of pain’, according to MacDonald, is a gift of love that is owed to both man and beast. Indeed, scenes of animal pain, such as the one involving Alister and his bulls, may appear troubling; however, MacDonald is concerned with the spiritual refinement of his characters and uses such ‘ministry’ to illustrate the nature of God’s care over his creation.

MacDonald applies the same theological argument in *A Rough Shaking*. During one point in the novel, Tommy, the young thief that accompanies Clare for part of his journey, causes trouble and Clare has to punish him. He does so by knocking Tommy to the ground with a sound punch between the eyes. MacDonald writes: ‘Never in his life did Clare show more instinctive wisdom than in that knock-down blow to the hardly blamable [sic] little devil!’²⁰⁸ Tommy’s punishment was needed in order for him to respect Clare. MacDonald uses this example to suggest God’s manner for disciplining his creation. MacDonald suggests:

There are thousands for whom a blow is a better thing than expostulation, persuasion, or any sort of kindness. They are such that nothing but a blow will set their door ajar for love to get in. That is why hardships, troubles, disappointments, and all kinds of pain and suffering, are sent to so many of us. We are so full of ourselves, and feel so grand, that we should never come to know what poor creatures we are, never begin to do better, but for the knock-down blows that the loving God gives us. We do not like them, but he does not spare us for that. (*RS*, Chapter XXIII, ‘Treasure Trove’, 152)

Before moving on, an example from *Alec Forbes of Howglen* deserves some attention. As was discussed earlier, little Annie Anderson is orphaned and placed under the supposed care of Robert Bruce and his family. One of the Bruces is actually a bulldog, named Juno, who has been spoiled and pampered by Robert Bruce until it has become an irritable bully. In many ways, Juno is similar to Barbara Catanach’s ill-tempered dog in *Malcolm*. Always harassing Annie, Juno eventually bites her. Alec hears of this and is troubled. Having already assumed the role of Annie’s protector, he forms a gang to sabotage and put to death the offending bulldog by means

²⁰⁸ George MacDonald, *A Rough Shaking* (London: Blackie & Sons, 1891; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1999); cited as *RS*, Chapter XXIII, ‘Treasure Trove’, p. 151.

of stoning. Indeed, the development of their plot is well-devised by MacDonald and the actual 'stoning' is vividly presented. Comically enough, Juno survives her execution and is brought to the school by Bruce, hoping to apprehend those who were guilty of the plot. Attempting to demonstrate Juno as a passive creature, Bruce places his hand in her mouth and is immediately bitten. Bruce cries out, 'Damn the bitch!', and immediately leaves the school, ashamed at having made a fool of himself and by swearing in front of the children (*AF*, Chapter XVIII, 75).

Juno's temperament had been previously formed by Bruce's pampering of her as well as by his neglect in properly punishing her when she harassed Annie and the other children of Glamerton. A similar occurrence is found in *The Princess and Curdie* when Curdie and Lina kill two dogs which attack them in Gwyntystorm. Their owners come out, threatening to kill Lina. Curdie claims in self-defence: 'We have done no wrong. We were walking quietly up your street, when your dogs flew at us. If you don't teach your dogs how to treat strangers, you must take the consequences' (*PC*, Chapter XIV, 'The Dogs of Gwyntystorm', 145). With this, MacDonald is suggesting that certain degenerate animals must be ruled over by humans.

Another issue that is apparent in MacDonald's fiction is animal abuse, which he presents as the opposite of discipline. MacDonald presents two distinct types of animal abuse in his fiction: physical abuse (unnecessary whippings or beatings), and spiritual abuse (spoiling a pet by means of pampering). Believing that one's spiritual state is of greater consequence, MacDonald must have felt that the latter form of abuse was the greater of the two.²⁰⁹

When the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) was founded in 1824, one of the organisation's primary objectives was simply to raise awareness of the mistreatment of horses. Rod Preece claims that horses remained 'the central humanitarian concern throughout the nineteenth century' (216). Episodes involving the mistreatment of horses (whippings, mostly)

²⁰⁹ This idea is also revealed in the above 'Letter to an Unidentified Woman, 5 November 1893' in Sadler, p. 358.

abound in MacDonald's novels, suggesting, as well, that it may have remained an issue throughout the century.²¹⁰ Two strong examples wherein such whippings occur are found in *Donal Grant* (1883) and *Heather and Snow* (1893). In *Donal Grant*, the novel's hero and title character takes the position as tutor of a young boy named Davie at Castle Graham. Davie's older brother, Lord Forgue, has a similar nature to Sercombe from *What's Mine's Mine*. Though MacDonald presents Forgue with more gentleness than he does Sercombe, Forgue, nevertheless, is a self-righteous character and soon comes to loathe Donal's virtuous nature early in the novel. This initial break between the two characters occurs over Forgue's mistreatment of his horse. MacDonald presents the scene vividly: as Donal is walking one day, he comes upon Forgue incessantly whipping his horse in an effort to make it obey his command. Of Forgue's thoughts about horses, MacDonald writes: 'they were to him creatures to be compelled, not friends with whom to hold sweet concert. He had not learned that to rule ill is worse than to obey ill' (*Donal Grant*, Chapter XV, 'Horse and Man', 63). Donal tells Forgue that his treatment is unmanly, but Forgue, unable to quench his fiery temper, continues to attack his horse and even strikes Donal across the face with his whip. Eventually, Donal throws Forgue off the horse, not, however, because he himself was struck but because Forgue turned his wrath upon the horse's head. Donal knew that Forgue was no longer trying to discipline the horse but was now torturing it out of his own frustration.

This is not the only episode where Forgue tortures a horse. Much later in the novel, Forgue lames Lady Arctura's horse, Larkie, by riding him too hard. Ignorant of Larkie's injury, Arctura mounts him and attempts to jump a small ditch within their riding ground. As may be expected, the jump is unsuccessful and Arctura is injured in a fall. MacDonald writes that after the accident: 'Forgue came behind in a devilish humour. He knew that first his ill usage of

²¹⁰ Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877) is another strong literary example which testifies this idea.

Larkie, and then his preventing anything being said about it, must have been the cause of the accident; but he felt some satisfaction—for self simply makes devils of us’ (*Donal Grant*, Chapter LXVIII, ‘Larkie’, 334). Mimicking Sercombe’s depiction in *What’s Mine’s Mine*, MacDonald classifies animals’ enemies as satanic figures.

In *Heather and Snow*, a late Scottish novel, MacDonald tells the story of Kirsty Barclay, the novel’s heroine, and Francis Gordon, the novel’s antagonist, who eventually redeems himself by the end of the book. Francis’s key flaw is his immaturity, characterised mostly by the ill-treatment of his pony, Don. During one scene, Francis rides Don into town but manages to fasten his curb too tightly, causing him to occasionally rear up in pain. Kirsty’s father, David, takes notice of Don’s predicament and intercedes to loosen his curb. Francis is insolent at David’s interference but is unable to stop him. Furthermore, whilst soothing the pony, David discovers that Francis is wearing spurs and cries out: ‘God bless my sowl! [...] hae ye the spurs on as weel? Stick ane o’ them intil him again, and I’ll cast ye frae the seddle’.²¹¹ David served Francis’s father as sergeant during their service in the East India Company; they were life-long friends and after Colonel Gordon (Francis’s father) died, David felt obligated to look after his son. Disappointed that Francis had allowed himself to stoop to a position wherein he would abuse a defenceless pony with spurs, David reminds him what a worthy father he once had by adding:

I’ the thick o’ a fecht, the lang blades playin aboot yer father’s heid like lights i’ the north, he never stack spur intil’s chairger needless!

[...] Francie, Francie, i’ the name o’ yer father I beg ye to regaird the richts o’ the neebour ye sit upo’. Gien ye dinna that, ye’ll come or lang to think little o’ yer human neebour as weel, carin only for what ye get oot o’ ’im! (*HS*, Chapter X, ‘David and Francis’, 74)

Unlike Malcolm, who needs to wear spurs for Kelpie’s sake in *The Marquis of Lossie*, Francis uses the spurs while riding Don because he simply chooses to do so and does not consider the

²¹¹ George MacDonald, *Heather and Snow* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1893; reprinted by Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2004); cited as *HS*, Chapter X, ‘David and Francis’, p. 73.

needless pain it inflicts upon his pony. Francis's character, however, is too degraded to perceive David's warning, and so, in retaliation, he digs his spurs into Don all the harder and runs away. MacDonald illustrates Francis's degenerative nature by showing him abusing the pony.

In some cases, animal cruelty enacted by a character leads to that same character's redemption. Despite their heroic natures, both Alec and Curdie are still imperfect. Unlike other heroes, such as Gibbie Galbraith, Robert Falconer, and Malcolm MacPhail, Alec struggles with right and wrong throughout the novel; it is his victory through these tribulations which forms him into a hero by the end of the book. One of his adolescent mistakes is torturing a large company of animals. Alec and his gang capture several farm animals and domestic pets, tying each animal to another's tail until a long parade is formed. Thinking it would be amusing, they set the parade in motion through Glamerton. The parade begins with large animals, such as cows and horses, and then tapers in size to calves, goats, dogs, and a cat. At the end of the animal train is a rabbit, tragically tied to the cat's tail. Stricken with the fear of being tied to a cat, the rabbit, in its struggle, is dragged to its death. Alec and his friends are quickly discovered by Thomas Crann as the culprits. Thomas presents Alec with the dead rabbit and reminds him that it belongs to Andrew Truffey, a young child who had been crippled during an earlier incident with his enraged schoolmaster. In an effort to defend himself, Alec says: 'I didna mean to kill't. 'Twas a' for fun, ye ken' (*AF*, Chapter XXXII, 145). Thomas' reply is stern, yet full of pathos: 'There's a heap o' fun, [...] that carries deith i' the tail o' 't. Here's the puir cripple laddie's rabbit as deid's a herrin', and him at hame greetin' his een oot, I daursay' (*AF*, Chapter XXXII, 145). Thomas then proceeds to admonish Alec's childish behaviour. This action, along with Thomas' reprimand, becomes one of the defining moments in Alec's spiritual and intellectual growth. MacDonald writes afterwards: 'There had been a growing, though it was still a vague sense in

Alec's mind, that he was not doing well; and this rebuke of Thomas Crann brought it full into the light of his own consciousness. From that day he worked better' (*AF*, Chapter XXXII, 146).

Curdie has a similar experience to that of Alec. Unlike his heroic persona in *The Princess and the Goblin*, Curdie, in *The Princess and Curdie*, starts out as a degenerate youth. Walking home from the mines one evening, Curdie discovers a white pigeon. MacDonald writes:

It was indeed a lovely being, and Curdie thought how happy it must be flitting through the air with a flash—a live bolt of light. For a moment he became so one with the bird that he seemed to feel both its bill and its feathers, as the one adjusted the other to fly again, and his heart swelled with the pleasure of its involuntary sympathy. (*PC*, Chapter II, 'The White Pigeon', 23-4)

Though Curdie initially *blesses* the living creature in his heart, his blessing quickly morphs into a curse. Like Coleridge's mariner who rashly shoots an albatross and is followed by terrible consequences, Curdie shoots the pigeon with his bow and arrow. MacDonald writes: 'With a gush of pride at his skill, and pleasure at its success, he ran to pick up his prey. I must say for him he picked it up gently—perhaps it was the beginning of his repentance' (*PC*, Chapter II, 'The White Pigeon', 24). Whilst holding the bleeding pigeon in his hands, Curdie becomes ashamed of his action and understands that he had, in truth, committed a crime. This, then, brings Curdie to recall his former adventures with Princess Irene along with her mystical Grandmother and he chooses to run and find the strange woman in the hope that she may save the dying pigeon. Curdie is successful at finding her in her tower and discovers that the pigeon was actually sent to Curdie in an attempt to turn him back towards a spiritually-upward path.

A similar lesson is illustrated during an earlier scene in *Donal Grant* (published the same year as *The Princess and Curdie*) when Donal is tutoring Davie. The subject of Donal's lesson to Davie is Christ's mission of taking away sin. In a rather blunt manner of helping Davie to understand what it means to sin, Donal says:

When we find out one wicked thing we do, it is a beginning to finding out all the wicked things we do. Some people would rather not find them out, but have them hidden from themselves and from God too. But let us find them out, every one of them, that we may ask Jesus to take them away, and help Jesus to take them away, by fighting them with all our strength.—This morning you pulled the little pup's ears till he screamed. [...] You stopped a while, and then did it again! So I knew it wasn't that you didn't know. (*Donal Grant*, Chapter XVIII, 'A Clash', 87-8)

Davie is immediately ashamed; but, instead of reacting as did his older brother (Forgue) when he was whipping his horse, Davie remains open to Donal's rebuke.

Donal emphasises his point by asking Davie if the Christ-child would have done such an action. Davie answers that Christ would not have tortured the animal for it would have been wrong to do so, but Donal corrects him, stating:

I suspect, rather, it is because he would have loved the little pup. He didn't have to think about its being wrong. He loves every kind of living thing. He wants to take away your sin because he loves you. He doesn't merely want to make you not cruel to the little pup, but to take away the wrong *think* that doesn't love him. He wants to make you love every living creature. Davie, Jesus came out of the grave to make us good. (*Donal Grant*, Chapter XVIII, 'A Clash', 88)

MacDonald's lesson is strikingly obvious: loving all creatures is a progressive step towards Christ-likeness.

In *Heather and Snow*, Francis eventually learns the error of his ways and works diligently towards becoming a better man. In so doing, his ill-treatment of animals is checked. This is demonstrated towards the novel's end as Francis attempts to wean his mother from alcohol. As with Gibbie Galbraith's mission of aiding alcoholics in the final chapters of *Sir Gibbie* (1879), MacDonald illustrates a similar mission in *Heather and Snow*. In an effort to bring some form of tenderness back to his mother, Francis purchases a fine carriage with horses and offers them to her as a gift. However, MacDonald adds a warning: 'if ever she took advantage of them, [Francis] would send both carriage and horses away' (*HS*, Chapter XXXVIII, 'The Neighbours', 311). Francis did this because 'the desire of his heart was to behold her a free woman' (*HS*, Chapter XXXVIII, 'The Neighbours', 311). Kirsty also comes to Mrs Gordon's aid after

recalling something that she had once read, ‘that a man ought to regard his neighbour as specially characterized by the possession of this or that virtue or capacity, whatever it might be, that distinguished him; for that was the door-plate indicating the proper entrance to his inner house’ (*HS*, Chapter XXXIX, ‘Kirsty Gives Advice’, 315). Remembering that Mrs Gordon was once renowned for her skilled horsemanship, Kirsty suggests that Francis purchase her a lady’s horse to care for as her own. In the meantime, Mrs Gordon fights and eventually overcomes her reliance upon alcohol. A fine horse is quickly purchased for her as a reward and by learning to care for her it, along with a few other lessons, Mrs Gordon begins to improve.

In the end, MacDonald believed that the special bond between humans and animals was there to help one another aspire towards Christ’s perfection. Humans, as it seems in MacDonald’s fiction, are responsible for the moral and physical wellbeing of animals. Characters that aspire to be like Christ by acting like fellow-workers with God treat animals with this idea in mind. Characters (and sometimes villains) who are not yet capable of understanding this have the potential to abuse their power over animals.

Part Two

The Human Animal: Representations of Evolution and Degeneration

Though MacDonald may have seen little value in knowledge for the sake of knowledge, he, nevertheless, approached science sympathetically and defended its importance alongside poetry, perhaps following Shelley’s enthusiasm for the subject.²¹² Greville MacDonald reports

²¹² See MacDonald’s essay on Shelley in *Orts*, pp. 272-3.

that his father won third prize in chemistry during his time at King's College in Aberdeen and that he dreamt of moving to Germany to study under Justus von Liebig, who established the world's first school of chemistry at the University of Giessen and who was for MacDonald a personal hero (*GMDW*, 68 and 70-1).²¹³ Later, MacDonald gave lectures on chemistry at the Ladies' College in Manchester in 1855, but his dream of moving to studying at Giessen never came to fruition.²¹⁴ In the early 1870s, MacDonald showed his support for allowing women to pursue a medical education, which, up to that point, they had been denied.²¹⁵ Indeed, multiple celebrities, mostly scientists such as Darwin, also submitted letters declaring their support.

MacDonald's fascination with modern chemistry and science remained with him throughout his life as is evidenced within his literature. As well, MacDonald, influenced by the progressive science of the day, absorbed evolutionary theory and used it as a defining point within his own theology as is apparent from his sermon, 'The Hope of the Universe' and other places in his fiction. Ronald MacDonald, musing over his father's interest in natural science, writes: 'I believe that to the end science did but give him fresh pasture for an insatiable and fearlessly religious imagination' (53). Houghton claims that the theories modern science helped to construct created a vision of Utopia for the Victorians. He claims: 'By 1850 the evidence of paleontology [sic] made it possible to read the history of animal life as a great progressive development from the amoeba up through fishes to reptiles, to birds, to mammals, culminating—so far—in man' (36). With this, MacDonald appears to have shared the common attitude towards science with other Victorians for he would have interpreted the evidence taken from the fossil

²¹³ As well, for a thorough discussion regarding MacDonald's scholastic interest in chemistry and the influence of William Gregory, a student of von Liebig and eventual Professor of Medicine at King's College from 1840-4, see David S. Robb's article, 'George MacDonald and Animal Magnetism', *VII: An Anglo-American Literary Review*, 8 (1987), pp. 9-24.

²¹⁴ See *GMDW*, pp. 216-7, for examples regarding the knowledge and subject matter of these lectures.

²¹⁵ 'Letter to Louisa Stevenson, 27 April [1871]', National Library of Scotland, Acc. 6414.

record to suggest that all living organisms (man included) are physically aspiring towards perfection.

Yet, the division between modern science and poetry remained for MacDonald a constant source of strife. In his essay, 'A Sketch of Individual Development' (1880), MacDonald theorises that the two are not exactly opposed to one another.²¹⁶ Poetry, as it seems to MacDonald, is intimidated by science. He writes:

For at the entrance of Science, nobly and gracefully as she bears herself, young Poetry shrinks back startled, dismayed. Poetry is true as Science, and Science is holy as Poetry; but young Poetry is timid and Science is fearless, and bears with her a colder atmosphere than the other has yet learned to brave. It is not that Madam Science shows any antagonism to Lady Poetry; but the atmosphere and plane on which alone they can meet as friends who understand each other, is the mind and heart of the sage, not of the boy. (*Orts*, 'A Sketch of Individual Development', 51)

This is the dilemma Paul Faber faces during his youth in *Paul Faber, Surgeon*. Originally inspired by poetry, Paul eventually falls under the spell of modern science and never again feels that he can return to his earlier state. MacDonald writes of Paul's past: 'He had indeed in his youth been passionately fond of such verse. Then came a time in which he turned from it with a sick dismay' (*PFS*, Chapter XV, 'The Parlor at Owlkirk', 79). However, MacDonald may be making a different point with Paul's past: his sensitivity to animal pain and refusal to promote or defend the practice of vivisection in his laboratory may be due to his poetic upbringing. Though he may feel that the poetry of his youth is gone, he is still unable (or perhaps unwilling) to be fully subjected to the government of science.

Though MacDonald was a poet and spiritual philosopher, he was also a man interested in modern science and uniquely blended the two components throughout his fiction. Improvements in modern science changed the face of Victorian literature with the emergence of science fiction.

²¹⁶ In addition to this essay, see MacDonald's sermon, 'The Truth' in *US3*, pp. 459-79.

By the end of the century, the genre was well-established through writers such as Jules Verne and H.G. Wells.

MacDonald and the early writers of science fiction shared an interest in Darwin's particular concept of evolution and the question of atavism. Likewise, just as nineteenth-century improvements in science and medicine inspired the emergence of science fiction, so did it offer new ground for Gothic storytellers. Studies regarding the criminal mind were published by Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909) and others, suggesting that the inner nature of the criminal is written upon his face. Such signs are features of atavism, marking a Darwinian return to a degenerate or sub-human state. Although Darwin avoids the subject of atavism, he does approach the possibility of human reversion and links it to a degraded morality.²¹⁷

Thus, fears of the atavistic criminal were transcribed into the pages of Gothic novels. Kelly Hurley claims that fears of the atavistic criminal and signs marking human degeneration are ““gothic” versions of evolutionism—discourses that emphasized the potential indifferentiation and changeability of the human species’.²¹⁸ Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) are the best known examples that portray the atavistic villain and the fear of man’s possible regression to an earlier, animal state of being. Of this literary phenomenon, Stephen Arata writes:

A form of popular wisdom, degeneration theory received many of its most compelling articulations in the highly commonsensical modes of popular fiction. Indeed, to a greater extent than on the Continent, public discussion in Britain about social problems was carried on through the medium of mass market texts.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 2nd ed. (London: John Murray, 1889), pp. 36-43 and 137-43.

²¹⁸ Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), p. 10.

²¹⁹ Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin De Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), p. 4.

Indeed, fictions portraying the fear of the atavistic man and the return to an earlier, lower state were popular and would not have escaped MacDonald's attention.

One of the most striking literary examples that illustrates society's fear of regression in this period is given in the final chapter of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Prendick, after escaping Moreau's island and returning to human civilisation, discovers that the human beast still lingers in his fellow man. Prendick confesses:

When I lived in London the horror was well-nigh insupportable. I could not get away from men: their voices came through windows; locked doors were flimsy safeguards. I would go out into the streets to fight with my delusion, and prowling women would mew after me; furtive, craving men glance jealously at me; weary, pale workers go coughing by me with tired eyes and eager paces, like wounded deer dripping blood; old people, bent and dull, pass murmuring to themselves; and, all unheeding, a ragged tail of gibing children. (246-7)

The *human* society that Prendick is describing recalls the descriptions of the slum dwellers in the 'slum fiction' of the 1880s and 1890s. However, Prendick's horror does not stop with the lower social classes. Instead, it extends to include those dwelling in professional society. He continues:

Then I would turn aside into some chapel,—and even there, such was my disturbance, it seemed that the preacher gibbered 'Big Thinks,' even as the Ape-man had done; or into some library, and there the intent faces over the books seemed but patient creatures waiting for prey. (247)

In the end, Prendick turns his horror upon himself, afraid that he is no longer 'a reasonable creature, but only an animal tormented with some strange disorder in its brain which sent it to wander alone, like a sheep stricken with gid' (247). Wells also represents the full extent of human degeneration from reasonable creatures to the cannibalistic Morlocks in *The Time Machine* (1895).

Though MacDonald is not typically regarded as a Victorian Gothic writer, he does incorporate several Gothic motifs, such as haunted locations, macabre histories, etc., into his literature. In his novels of the 1870s and 1880s, MacDonald integrates the theories of evolution and degeneration. Like his contemporary, Charles Kingsley, MacDonald was sympathetic to the

theories of evolution and degeneration and felt that they offered him spiritual insight. The theory of atavism was particularly interesting to him.

Villains in MacDonald's fiction are sometimes compared to dangerous creatures. The obvious examples come from *The Princess and Curdie*: the Lord Chamberlain's hands reveal the talons of a bird of prey and Dr Kelman's hands reveal a lurking snake, complete with poison. In *Alec Forbes of Howglen*, Robert Bruce is continuously paralleled with the image of a crouching spider. Young Tommy, in *A Rough Shaking*, can hardly be classified as a villain, in the literary sense of the word, but he seems to be moving in the direction of becoming one. Always on the look-out for opportunities to steal, lie, and cheat, Tommy is rightly paralleled throughout the novel with a variety of mischievous animals such as ferrets and monkeys. MacDonald actually calls him a 'human animal' at one point and later describes his physiognomy as having the marks of a criminal (*RS*, 99, 135, 209, and 211).²²⁰ The possibility that moral transgression leads to animal regression, suggests that MacDonald was attempting to make some theological sense out of the possibility of human degeneration.

In contrast to these villains, MacDonald's heroes are strong men, such as Robert Falconer and Malcolm MacPhail, whereas others, such as Harry Armstrong in *Adela Cathcart*, Alec Forbes, and Curdie serve as good examples for the 'muscular Christian' character type made popular in the mid-nineteenth century with Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857) and Charles Kingsley's *Westward, Ho!* (1855).²²¹ Likewise, as the men are strong in both intellect and physique, the women are sensitive and plain (modelled, possibly, on Louisa MacDonald's plain features). Incredibly, their beauty is sometimes enhanced by their reading of

²²⁰ Concerning a discussion of physiognomy and degeneracy, see Arata, pp. 11-32.

²²¹ For a discussion regarding the theme of the 'muscular Christian' in MacDonald's work, see John Pennington, 'Muscular Spirituality in George MacDonald's Curdie Books' in *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, ed. by Donald E. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), pp. 133-49.

Wordsworth, as is the case with Margaret Elginbrod in *David Elginbrod* and Barbara Wylder in *There and Back* (1891).²²²

As well, MacDonald does something that would have been quite daring for his time. Starting in the 1870s, MacDonald began to include ‘divine idiots’ and genetically ‘handicapped’ characters as heroes. Challenging the theories of Lombroso and Darwin, MacDonald writes peculiar weaknesses into certain characters regarding their physicality so that he might place greater emphasis upon their spirituality. Diamond, Gibbie Galbraith, the Polwarths from the *Wingfold* trilogy, and Steenie from *Heather and Snow* are all prime examples of this sort.

In addition to these characters, MacDonald offers his own perception of evolution and degeneration. He does this primarily by *humanising* animals and *animalising* humans. To clarify this terminology, MacDonald humanises an animal character when he develops the character and voice of the animal in order to signify spiritual truth or virtue. Likewise, MacDonald animalises or dehumanises a human character by revealing the beast within in order to illustrate that character’s spiritual state of being.

In an early poem, ‘A Hidden Life’ (1857), MacDonald presents the spiritual maturation of a character (whose name is never given). After attending university in ‘that great city of the North’ (King’s College, Aberdeen), the young man returns to his father’s farm and chooses to remain in his father’s profession.²²³ In his earthly life, the hero is already attaining Christ’s perfection and seems to be almost at one with God. This is demonstrated in several ways, one of which is through his relationship with animals. As his work requires that certain animals be slain for food, he kills them ‘with generous suddenness, | Like God’s benignant lightning’ (*PW1*, ‘A

²²² See this illustrated in *DE*, Chapter IX, ‘Nature’, pp. 45-6, and *There and Back*, Chapter XV, ‘Barbara Wylder’, pp. 83-4.

²²³ George MacDonald, ‘A Hidden Life’ in *Poems in PW1*, pp. 134-68, p. 142.

Hidden Life', 149). His handling of the animals mirrors his understanding of God's fatherhood.

MacDonald writes:

'For,' he said,
 'God makes the beasts, and loves them dearly
 well—
 Better than any parent loves his child,
 It may be,' would he say; for still the *may be*
 Was sacred with him no less than the *is*—
 In such humility he lived and wrought—
 'Hence are they sacred. Sprung from God as we,
 They are our brethren in a lower kind,' [...]. (PWI, 'A Hidden Life', 149)

MacDonald does more than simply theorise that man and animals (and plants, in this case) share a common brotherhood, fathered by God; he proposes that both are either journeying towards or away from Christ's perfection.

Building upon man's brotherhood with the animals, MacDonald adds:

'And in their [the animals'] face we see the human look.'
 If any said: 'Men look like animals;
 Each has his type set in the lower kind;'
 His [the poem's hero] answer was: 'The animals are like men;
 Each has his true type set in the higher kind,
 Though even there only rough-hewn as yet.
 The hell of cruelty will be the ghosts
 Of the sad beasts: their crowding heads will come,
 And with encircling, slow pain-patient eyes,
 Stare the ill man to madness.' (PWI, 'A Hidden Life', 149)

These are bold words, indeed, and they continue to resurface throughout the remainder of MacDonald's writing. Interestingly, Thomas Wingfold quotes the latter part of these lines in his 'animal sermon' (PFS, Chapter XXVII, 'The Groans of the Inarticulate', 181). As well, these lines simply suggest that MacDonald accepted the general idea that there is a connection, over time, between humans and animals.

More importantly, understanding MacDonald's theology is paramount to understanding his perception of evolution. In his sermon, 'The Inheritance' (1889), MacDonald writes:

For the infinitude of God can only begin and only go on to be revealed, through his infinitely differing creatures—all capable of wondering at, admiring, and loving each other, and so bound all in one in him, each to the others revealing him. For every human being is like a facet cut in the great diamond to which I may dare liken the father of him who likens his kingdom to a pearl. Every man, woman, child—for the incomplete also is his, and in its very incompleteness reveals him as a progressive worker in his creation—is a revealer [sic] of God.²²⁴

MacDonald then extends this revelation of God within man to the animal by adding:

Your dog, your horse tells you about him who cares for all his creatures. None of them came from his hands. Perhaps the precious things of the earth, the coal and the diamonds, the iron and clay and gold, may be said to have come from his hands; but the live things come from his heart—from near the same region whence ourselves we came. How much my horse may, in his own fashion—that is, God's equine way—know of him, I cannot tell, because he cannot tell. Also, we do not know what the horses know, because they are horses, and we are at best, in relation to them, only horsemen. The ways of God go down into microscopic depths, as well as up into telescopic heights—and with more marvel, for there lie the beginnings of life: the immensities of stars and worlds all exist for the sake of less things than they. So with mind; the ways of God go into the depths yet unrevealed to us; he knows his horses and dogs as we cannot know them, because we are not yet pure sons of God. When through our sonship, as Paul teaches, the redemption of these lower brothers and sisters shall have come, then we shall understand each other better. But now the lord of life has to look on at the wilful [sic] torture of multitudes of his creatures. It must be that offences come, but woe unto that man by whom they come! The Lord may seem not to heed, but he sees and knows. (*US3*, 'The Inheritance', 612-3)

Not only does MacDonald urge better treatment towards animals, he places significant emphasis upon animal spirituality and theorises that all things are in a state of natural evolution. With this, MacDonald places humans and animals together on the journey towards perfection in Christ, which he interprets as divine evolution. This affirms his belief that natural evolution and spiritual evolution are parallel components of each other.

In his sermon, 'The Hope of the Universe', published a few years later, MacDonald argues:

If the Lord said very little about animals, could he have done more for them than tell men that his father cared for them? He has thereby wakened and is wakening in the hearts of men a seed his father planted. It grows but slowly, yet has already borne a little precious fruit. His loving friend St Francis has helped him, and many others have tried, and are now trying to help him: whoever sows the seed of that seed the Father planted is helping the Son. Our behaviour to the animals, our words concerning them, are seed, either good

²²⁴ George MacDonald, 'The Inheritance' in *US3*, pp. 607-19, p. 612.

or bad, in the hearts of our children. No one can tell to what the animals might not grow, even here on the old earth under the old heaven, if they were but dealt with according to their true position in regard to us. They are, in sense very real and divine, our kindred. (*HG*, 'The Hope of the Universe', 216-7)

MacDonald is making a significant argument here. By claiming that animals are spiritually and physically connected to man, MacDonald argues that man has a moral obligation to look after the rights and welfare of animals.

Most likely, the source of MacDonald's belief in the unique connection between animals and humans came from his Romantic roots. Works such as Burns's 'Tam O' Shanter' (1790), 'The Auld Farmer's New-Year Morning Salutation to His Auld Mare Maggie' (1786), and 'To a Mouse' (1786) depicted a special relationship between man and animal, not one of labour but of camaraderie. Inspired, MacDonald infused his works with similar depictions of heart-felt emotions shared between his characters and their horses, pets, or other animals they encounter. In his poem, 'A Hidden Life', MacDonald seems to echo two of Burns's poems, 'To a Mountain Daisy' (1786) and 'To a Mouse' when his unnamed hero observes the world around him. MacDonald writes:

Behold, the earth was beautiful! The sky
Shone with the expectation of the sun.
Only the daisies grieved him, for they fell
Caught in the furrow, with their innocent heads
Just out, imploring. A gray hedgehog ran,
With tangled mesh of rough-laid spikes, and face
Helplessly innocent, across the field:
He let it run, and blessed it as it ran. (*PWI*, 'A Hidden Life', 139-40)

MacDonald does more than simply bless the creatures in his writing: he humanises them. Shortly after these lines, MacDonald's hero begins to understand the divine harmony inherent in all living things. MacDonald adds:

Each morning now was a fresh boon to him;
Each wind a spiritual power upon his life;
Each individual animal did share
A common being with him; every kind

Of flower from every other was distinct,
 Uttering that for which alone it was—
 Its something human, wrapt in other veil. (*PWI*, 'A Hidden Life', 141)

By humanising the animal, something that Burns does not do, MacDonald broadens his theology to affirm that all living things reveal God and are ever journeying home to him. Interestingly, in his novel, *A Rough Shaking*, MacDonald claims to go further in this belief than did Burns. Whilst describing Clare's sensitivity to animals, MacDonald mentions his perception of plants, claiming that 'He was more sympathetic with the daisies ploughed down than was even Burns, for he had a strong feeling that they went somewhere, and were the better for going' (*RS*, Chapter VII, 'Clare and His Brothers', 70).

In some works, animals simply provide comfort when no human comfort is possible. An early example of this idea is found in *Alec Forbes of Howglen*. Although the novel tells of the adventures and maturation of the title character, equal attention is given to the story of Annie Anderson, an orphaned girl slightly younger than Alec. The opening chapter presents the reader with the funeral of Annie's father. Motherless and alone, Annie can only find comfort with a cow named Brownie. MacDonald presents a tender scene as the young child walks up to Brownie and says: 'Naebody mindit me, an' sae I cam to you, Broonie' (*AF*, Chapter II, 5). Isolated from her father's funeral, Annie finds comfort with her bovine friend in the stable. Soon enough, Annie's ill-tempered aunt looks for her and finds her in the stable. In contrast with Brownie, the aunt is rough, stern, and bitter with the thought of having to care for the child now that the father is dead. MacDonald writes: 'For to Annie and her needs, notwithstanding the humble four-footedness of Brownie, there was in her large mild eyes, and her hairy, featureless face, all nose and no nose, more of the divine than in the human form of Auntie Meg' (*AF*, Chapter II, 6).

Eventually, Annie is sent to live in town with Robert Bruce and his family, as was discussed earlier. Like so many other villains in MacDonald's fiction, Robert is a religious

hypocrite and a quintessential *mammon*-worshipper. Shirking his responsibility for the child, he gives her the least adequate room in his house—one filled with rats, which terrorise her at night. In a rather captivating scene, Annie, horrified to the point that she is physically incapable of crying aloud, cries out in her heart: ‘O God, tak care o’ me frae the rottans’ (*AF*, Chapter VIII, 25). Immediately afterwards, a cat enters the room and sends the rats away. This example demonstrates that when loving humans are absent, animals can take their places as guardians. Eventually, Annie meets the title character and finds in him a human protector.

Thus, MacDonald sometimes suggests that the animal can represent a spiritual symbol. This is shown in two ways. First, animals can be instruments to reveal the divine. For instance, animal characters such as Lina in *The Princess and Curdie*, the horses, Old Diamond and Ruby, in *At the Back of the North Wind*, the dog, Abdiel, in *A Rough Shaking*, and Mara’s cats in *Lilith* actively work for the good of the human characters (e.g. finding them work or saving them from danger).

Second, animals can represent certain aspects of virtue (or divine evolution) in a human. Thus, MacDonald sometimes compares a heroic character to an appropriate animal. Two examples of this idea can be illustrated with *Malcolm* and *Heather and Snow*. In *Malcolm*, MacDonald reveals some facets of his own divine evolutionary theory through the methodology of Alexander Graham and his manner of giving *pet* names (such as Sheltie and Mappy) to his students. The names typically refer to an animal’s characteristic which the child playfully reveals. Incredibly, this is not Graham mocking his pupils; instead, his pupils see the pet names as a reward which they must earn. Each name is given in light of the deserving pupil’s character traits. MacDonald writes: ‘To gain one was to reach the highest honour of the school; the withdrawal of it was the severest of punishments, and the restoring of it the sign of perfect

reconciliation' (*Malcolm*, Chapter VII, 'Alexander Graham', 35). MacDonald also adds that Graham:

permitted no one else to use it, and was seldom known to forget himself so far as to utter it while its owner was in disgrace. The hope of gaining such a name, or the fear of losing it, was in the pupil the strongest ally of the master, the most powerful enforcement of his influences. It was a scheme of government by aspiration. (*Malcolm*, Chapter VII, 'Alexander Graham', 35)

Incredibly, the act of taking away a pupil's pet name, which is the symbolic removal of the animal's sign, is considered by the pupils to be the ultimate punishment.

MacDonald gives an example of an incident whereby two pupils are caught fighting. One of the pupils had been previously rewarded with a pet name, *Poochy* (in reference to a kangaroo). The fight begins when another boy calls Poochy by his pet name (but uses it in an unfriendly manner). Poochy then strikes the offensive child. However, Graham reprimands Poochy's behaviour, telling him: 'The offence was against me: he had no right to use my name for you, and the quarrel was mine. For the present you are Poochy no more: go to your place, William Wilson' (*Malcolm*, Chapter VII, 'Alexander Graham', 34). Following this, MacDonald writes that the boy returns, weeping, to his seat. Placing Graham's principles for discipline in the schoolroom beside those of another Scottish schoolmaster, Murdoch 'Murder' Malison, in *Alec Forbes of Howglen*, makes for an interesting comparison. In the latter novel, MacDonald represents schoolroom discipline as a law:

It was the custom of the time and of the country to use the tawse unsparingly; for *law* having been, and still, in a great measure, being, the highest idea generated of the divine by ordinary Scotch mind, it must be supported, at all risks even, by means of the leather strap. In the hands of a wise and even-tempered man, no harm could result from the use of this instrument of justice; but in the hands of a fierce-tempered and therefore changeable man, of small moral stature, and liable to prejudices and offence, it became the means of unspeakable injury to those under his care. (*AF*, Chapter XV, 61)

For MacDonald, Graham is the ideal schoolmaster who is 'wise and even-tempered' enough to know how to properly punish a misbehaving pupil by targeting his or her moral conscience.

Graham is able to perceive not only the good qualities of his pupils, but also the good qualities of animals. These good qualities are brought to the surface, revealing virtuous progression which could be interpreted as divine evolution. MacDonald writes:

Without having read a word of Swedenborg, he [Graham] was a believer in the absolute correspondence of the inward and outward; and, thus long before the younger Darwin arose, had suspected a close relationship—remote identity, indeed in nature and history, between the animal and human worlds. (*Malcolm*, Chapter VII, ‘Alexander Graham’, 35)

With his ability to look deeper into the connection between humans and animals, Graham is truly ahead of his time. Furthermore, he infuses these theories into his pupils by becoming for them a role-model. Therefore, Malcolm’s mission to spiritually discipline the ill-tempered mare, Kelpie, is due to Graham’s instruction regarding the close relationship between the spiritual and natural.

In *Heather and Snow*, MacDonald uses an animal (or at least the symbol of an animal) to present virtue in the character of Stephen (Steenie) Barclay, Kirsty’s older brother. As mentioned earlier, Steenie is one of the ‘divine-idiot’ heroes in MacDonald’s fiction and our first impression of him in the novel is that he genuinely imagines himself to be a dog. MacDonald describes him as ‘a gaunt, long-backed lad, who, at certain seasons undetermined, either imagined himself the animal he imitated, or had some notion of being required, or, possibly, compelled to behave like a dog’ (*HS*, Chapter IV, ‘Dog-Steenie’, 31-2). Kirsty does not appear to be bothered with this and treats him gently, as if he really were the panting dog at her feet. MacDonald points out that Kirsty is ‘exceptionally strong, in absolute health, and specially gifted with patience’ (*HS*, Chapter IV, ‘Dog-Steenie’, 38). Regarding her thoughts about Steenie, MacDonald adds:

She had so early entertained and so firmly grasped the idea that she was sent into the world expressly to take care of Steenie, that devotion to him had grown into a happy habit with her. The waking mind gave itself up to the sleeping, the orderly to the troubled brain, the true heart to the heart as true. (*HS*, Chapter IV, ‘Dog-Steenie’, 38-9)

Therefore, by actively working for Steenie's well-being, Kirsty's spiritual nature is refined. Her evolution, like all of MacDonald's characters, depends solely upon her being a fellow-worker with God, loving others with obedient service.

The factor which sets Steenie apart from his refined sister is his significant connection to the divine. Unlike the atavistic villains in MacDonald's fiction who are represented by a malicious animal such as a snake or a spider, Steenie's condition is not degenerative. Instead, his condition signifies the progressive growth from an inferior to a superior state of being. In the novel, although others attribute Steenie's condition to his mother having received a significant shock before he was born, MacDonald reveals clues suggesting that Steenie's condition is due to his spiritual awareness rather than a mental dysfunction. During the night, as his family is asleep, Steenie roams the Highland hills, looking for the 'bonny man' whom we are left to assume is Christ. As the evening draws near, Steenie's *dog*-self begins to dissipate and his *man*-self comes forth. MacDonald describes the change in one scene:

Although he had been all day acting a dog in charge of sheep, and treating the collie as his natural companion, there was, both in his countenance and its expression, a remarkable absence of the animal. He had a kind of exaltation in his look; he seemed to expect something, not at hand, but sure to come. (*HS*, Chapter VI, 'Man-Steenie', 43-4)

Observing Steenie's change, Kirsty lays her hand on his head and simply states, 'in a tone of unutterable tenderness', 'Man-Steenie!' (*HS*, Chapter VI, 'Man-Steenie', 44). From that moment, Steenie is a dog no more but becomes a mystical young man, acting and speaking much like a prophet from another world. This, of course, is MacDonald's point. The sole reason why Steenie transforms to become a part of Kirsty's world is to illustrate the nature of divine evolution and harmony with Christ.

Steenie's inner nature is symbolised by an obedient dog. The characteristic of *obedience* does not signify degenerate atavism. Although MacDonald presents a multitude of evil dogs

throughout his fiction (such as those belonging to Robert Bruce, Barbara Catanach, and the people of Gwyntystorm), he also presents good dogs to symbolise faithful obedience and loving service.

MacDonald may easily have been inspired by the story of Greyfriars Bobby, which tells of a Skye Terrier who supposedly sat by his master's grave at Greyfriars Kirkyard in Edinburgh until his own death in 1872, fourteen years later. Whether the story of the dog is true or not, the Victorians were astounded by Bobby's devotion in remaining near his master's grave and a statue was commissioned in 1872 to immortalise his feat. MacDonald's knowledge of Greyfriars Bobby was likely. Two of his novels depict dogs with similar feats of perseverance. In *The Vicar's Daughter* (1872), a character's foster-child is abducted by a gypsy woman and carried away. After a long search, the child is eventually discovered and reclaimed. Yet the successful outcome is owed to a dog named Wagtail, who, during an attempt to seize the gypsy, is wounded. The narrator concludes her story with: 'And from that day he was no more called bare Wagtail, but Mr. Wagtail, much to the amusement of visitors, who, hearing the name gravely uttered, as it soon came to be, saw the owner of it approach on all fours, with a tireless pendulum in his rear' (VD, Chapter X, 'Wagtail Comes to Honor', 69). Inspired, perhaps, by the idea of a dog's devotion to its master, MacDonald, in this novel, suggests that they can be more than simple, household pets, and so he casts Mr Wagtail as the saviour of the day.

In *A Rough Shaking*, MacDonald makes a direct comparison to Greyfriars Bobby with Abdiel. At one point in the novel, Clare and his companions are apprehended by a policeman and are held in a jail for a few days. For obvious reasons, Abdiel is not allowed to be detained with them and they are all separated from one another. However, Abdiel refuses to leave the spot where he and Clare were separated. The novel's narrator states: 'I suspect he had an approximate

canine theory of the whole matter. He knew at least that Clare had gone in with the others at that door; that he had not come out with them at the other door; that, therefore, in all probability, he was within that door still' (*RS*, Chapter XXXVII, 'The Magistrate', 218). A few days later, Clare is released. MacDonald writes:

the moment he stepped across the threshold, Clare met the comfort of God waiting for him. [...] there, to his unspeakable delight, was Abdiel, clinging to him with his fore-legs, and wagging his tail as if, like the lizards for terror, he would shake it off for gladness! What a blessed little pendulum was Abdiel's tail! It went by that weight of the clock of the universe called devotion. It was the escapement of that delight which is of the essence of existence, and which, when God has set right 'our disordered clocks,' will be its very consciousness. (*RS*, Chapter XXXVIII, 'The Workhouse', 220-1)

MacDonald's point is twofold: first, he is making a correlation between Abdiel's love and devotion towards Clare with that of Greyfriars Bobby and his dead and buried master; second, he is suggesting that the seemingly simple devotion that a dog has for its master is like the devotion that God has for his creation—and that when humans finally become cognisant of this universal law, they will fall into harmony with God. Thus, MacDonald suggests that the devotion shared between a master and his or her pet can have a spiritual meaning.

In the end, such dogs as these become family members and represent God's care over his creation. Even though Steenie, in *Heather and Snow*, must grow out of the dog and become a man, the original figure of the dog within him serves as his catalyst towards perfection and helps him understand that he must grow into a state of perfection in order to find his 'bonny man'.

Due to the persistent recurrence of the atavistic beast within the human in MacDonald's fiction, it is apparent that MacDonald has something more in his mind than simply describing the nature of a character by comparing him with an animal. With these similes, MacDonald is symbolising the true *self* of a particular character. For example, instead of comparing Robert Bruce to a spider, he is actually suggesting that Robert *is* a spider. Walter Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather* (3 vols, 1828-31) presents a Scottish legend about King Robert the Bruce, and

describes that after being defeated by the English army, Robert flees into exile. During his seclusion, he observes the methodology of a spider constructing a web in his cabin. Inspired, he re-groups his army, is victorious at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, and establishes Scottish freedom from England.²²⁵ Although MacDonald is clearly making a reference to the legend, he is also making a different type of parallel by suggesting that Robert has already digressed beyond the animal world and has now reached lower depths within the insect world. Furthermore, and perhaps more frighteningly, Robert's place in the insect world is an arachnid, one which feeds on other insects.

MacDonald is comfortable with the idea of evolution because it concurs with his theology and suggests that all things are journeying towards perfection. In addition, human degeneracy does not appear to frighten him for he would have interpreted it as an act of God's love for his creation. The idea is best illustrated in both *The Princess and Curdie* with the 'Uglies' being made to scale the ladder of evolution once more and the skeleton couple in *Lilith* who must learn to live together by aiding one another. In the latter case, the couple's muscles and ligaments eventually re-grow, attesting to the evolution of God's law. MacDonald believes that man's journey through life should form him to being more like Christ. If a man fails in this, then God gives him another chance to try until he succeeds. Since it is a fantasy novel, MacDonald is free to theorise without too many limitations.

Yet, MacDonald makes several attempts to suggest this idea in his non-fantasy novels as well. For instance, in *The Elect Lady* (1888), two characters are discussing the theory of evolution, which they refer to as 'development-theory', in regard to horses. One of the characters, Andrew Ingram, confesses his belief that evolution is God's manner of refining and

²²⁵ Walter Scott, *Tales of a Grandfather; Being Stories Taken from Scottish History. Humbly Inscribed Hugh Littlejohn, Esq.*, 3 Vols (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1828-31), I, Chapter VIII, 'The Rise of Robert the Bruce'.

perfecting his creation. Suggesting that horses (and animals, in general) have souls, Andrew claims that God makes the horses, ‘not out of nothing, but out of himself’ (*The Elect Lady*, Chapter XX, ‘George and Andrew’, 144). Their discussion then moves to the human subject. Andrew, having already confessed his theory of spiritual evolution, proposes his idea of degeneration, stating:

if we have come up from the lower animals, through a million of kinds, perhaps—against which theory I have nothing to urge—then I am more than prepared to believe that the man who does not do the part of a man, will have to go down again, through all the stages of his being, to a position beyond the lowest forms of the powers he has misused, and there begin to rise once more, haunted perhaps with dim hints of the world of humanity left so far above him. (*The Elect Lady*, Chapter XX, ‘George and Andrew’, 145)

Although the theory of degeneration was a significant literary subject used by late-Victorian Gothic writers, revealing the period’s fear of atavism by illustrating the inner beast within humanity, MacDonald re-theorises the subject and uses it as a means whereby God interacts with his creation.

MacDonald is very comfortable illustrating the beast within and the atavistic man. This is evident in the ways he shows human redemption and it is best exemplified in *Lilith*. Furthermore, MacDonald’s theology suggests the idea that all things, even Satan, will eventually choose to return *home* to God. MacDonald demonstrates this theory best in his sermon ‘It Shall Not Be Forgiven’ (1867), using the subject of Judas’s betrayal as his example. In the sermon, MacDonald rejects the common belief about Judas’s spiritual damnation. Instead, MacDonald writes:

I think, when Judas fled from his hanged and fallen body, he fled to the tender help of Jesus, and found it—I say not how. He was in a more hopeful condition now than during any moment of his past life, for he had never repented before. But I believe that Jesus loved Judas even when he was kissing him with the traitor’s kiss; and I believe that he was his Saviour still. [...] Judas had got none of the good of the world into which he had been born. He had not inherited the earth. He had lived an evil life, out of harmony with the world and its God. (*USI*, ‘It Shall Not Be Forgiven’, 64)

MacDonald then proceeds to characterise Judas much as he would any of the villains in his novels, arguing that the only good which could be offered to Judas would be to allow him to begin again, though spiritually (and perhaps physically) degenerated. Thus, MacDonald adds: “‘It had been good for that man if he had not been born;” for it was all to try over again, in some other way—inferior perhaps, in some other world, in a lower school. He had to be sent down the scale of creation which is ever ascending towards its Maker’ (*USI*, ‘It Shall Not Be Forgiven’, 64).

What MacDonald is suggesting here is that when an individual chooses not to return *home*, then he or she degenerates into a lesser being, possibly an animal. Thus, MacDonald relates his villains to some type of animal or other subspecies to illustrate a character’s spiritual placement, such as Robert Bruce being paralleled with a spider and Lilith’s metamorphosis from a beautiful lady to a predatory cat. These are illustrated in various degrees. For instance, monkeys and apes typically represent mischievousness. Such characters as these are not quite malicious. True danger lies with serpents, felines, and predatory creatures. Barbara Catanach and Lilith are the quintessential cat-women. The latter actually has the ability to metamorphose into a cat. Likewise, a young lady in ‘The Gray Wolf’ (1871) has the ability (or perhaps curse) to transform into a malicious wolf. Her malady is never explained but MacDonald reveals clues to suggest that it is a product of her sexual lust. Caley, Florimel’s cunning lady’s maid in *The Marquis of Lossie*, and Dr Kelman, in *The Princess and Curdie*, are both revealed as potentially deadly serpents. It is no coincidence that Malcolm, upon being introduced to Caley, mistakes her name for ‘Scaley’; MacDonald notes ‘if that was not her name, yet scaly was her nature’ (*ML*, Chapter XXIX, ‘An Evil Omen’, 125). Shortly afterwards, Malcolm comes upon the maid’s face, which is ‘radiant with such an expression as that of the woman-headed snake might have worn

when he saw Adam take the apple from the hand of Eve' (*ML*, Chapter XXIX, 'An Evil Omen', 125). Part of Malcolm's time in the novel is spent trying to divide Florimel from her maid. He tells her: 'That woman Caley, I am certain, is not to be trusted. She does not love you, my lady. [...] I have tried her spirit, [...] and know that it is of the devil. She loves herself too much to be true' (*ML*, Chapter XXXI, 'The Two Daimons', 135). MacDonald's point is strikingly clear: love directed to others suggests Christ-likeness, whereas love directed towards self suggests degeneration.

In *The Princess and Curdie*, written a few years after *The Marquis of Lossie*, MacDonald makes his point a little more apparent with the use of Curdie's unique gift of being able to detect, by a grasp of the hand, the type of animal into which a person may be growing. For instance, MacDonald writes that when Curdie takes the hand of a servant named Dr Kelman, he 'very nearly let him fall again, for what he held was not even a foot: it was the belly of a creeping thing' (*PC*, Chapter XIX, 'The King's Chamber', 192). Dr Kelman's serpent nature is more pronounced than Caley's. Due to his intent to poison the king, the snake within Dr Kelman is venomous and reveals its poison. In an attempt to foil Dr Kelman's design to poison the king's wine one evening, Curdie hides himself in the king's bedchamber and watches as the doctor enters the room. Curdie gazes at his face and observes the satisfied manner in which Dr Kelman adds his phial of poison to the king's cup. MacDonald writes: 'The light fell upon his [Dr Kelman's] face from above, and Curdie saw the snake in it plainly visible. He had never beheld such an evil countenance: the man hated the king, and delighted in doing him wrong' (*PC*, Chapter XXIII, 'Dr Kelman', 230-1). Like Malcolm's ability to see Caley's true face, Curdie sees Dr Kelman for what he has become. This is the only occurrence in the novel wherein Curdie

is able to use his eyesight to make this detection. In all other occasions, Curdie is only capable of detecting a character's inner nature by touching his or her hand.

Interestingly, we never see an animalised human reform into a higher state. Such characters either die in an act which may lead to their redemption or else they are left to grow worse. For instance, Dr Kelman and the others who seek to overthrow the king in *The Princess and Curdie* are carried off by the 'Uglies' to a place that suggests they will be made to fall down on the evolutionary scale. Robert Bruce and Barbara Catanach are never shown as repenting and their social crimes are never brought to justice. Instead, both characters seem to simply carry on. The fate of Lilith, perhaps, is the closest we come to witnessing a character turning from evil to good. Though her time of waking is never shown, readers are left with the knowledge that she is at least moving in the right direction.

In the end, we can be sure that MacDonald approached the subject of evolution and degeneration with a theological idea in mind. The theory of atavism and the animalisation of his characters affirm MacDonald's belief that all living things are ever on a journey towards God. Even regression is regarded by MacDonald as an act of kindness by God meant to aid the reformation of his creation as suggested by the case of Lina and the 'Uglies' in *The Princess and Curdie*. MacDonald's illustration of degeneration is likened to a state of detention or purgatory, where a character must overcome certain obstacles and limitations. Once these are overcome, the character is able to spiritually progress closer towards perfection in Christ.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Thesis Summation

The intention for this thesis has been to explore recurring social issues in George MacDonald's novels in order to come to a fuller understanding of how he perceived and represented Victorian society in his writings and to assess where he stood amongst other nineteenth-century writers who, likewise, incorporated social commentary into their literature. As well, this thesis has proposed a fresh reading of MacDonald as a Victorian novelist, setting him apart from the myth-maker persona that has time and again dictated how he has been academically interpreted.

Although MacDonald may have excelled in his literary art as a fantasist, his life was firmly grounded in reality. He did not escape from what may be seen today as a 'crisis of change' in the nineteenth century by inventing new worlds in Færie; instead, he reacted to those issues which seemed to trouble him most (i.e. urban poverty, man's withdrawal from Nature, animal welfare) by representing them in his novels. These issues, he believed, had negative effects on man's faith in God and, thus, brought man to despair. Though he was no longer a pulpit preacher, MacDonald used his novels as if they were social sermons to address these issues. Through his writings, MacDonald felt that he was countering the crisis of faith in his society. This particular aspect of his art has been overlooked for far too long. Therefore, this thesis has sought to provide a unique analysis of MacDonald's non-fantasy works, which have hitherto been largely unexplored by previous academic scholars. Most importantly, a critical approach has been taken to uncover how MacDonald responded to significant issues that were

present in his society. Overall, this thesis has demonstrated that MacDonald actively observed the world he lived in by becoming engaged with its joys and its troubles. Although his writings will never be interpreted as historical documents of the nineteenth century (nor should they be), we can, at least, see in them more than a glimpse of certain problems that affected his society.

Some of MacDonald's novels (such as those discussed in Chapter Two) are populated with characters modelled on nineteenth-century social reformers, such as Octavia Hill and John Ruskin, who embraced similar aspects of social reform by working to improve tenement housing conditions while instilling a desire in the people they were helping to improve their own lives, both physically and spiritually. Likewise, the heroes and heroines of *Robert Falconer* and *The Vicar's Daughter* persevered in their quest to refrain from giving monetary handouts, another of Hill's fundamental concepts, believing that such provisions counter the progression of social reform by keeping the poor in a constant state of beggary. Other provisions instead of monetary handouts were given to the poor. Music, poetry, art, flowers, and access to Nature (as was discussed in Chapter Three) were all seen by MacDonald as more meaningful provisions because they had the power to awaken God's imagination that is inherent in each person regardless of his or her social class. MacDonald never tired of teaching that the best thing anyone can do for another is to awaken something within that person that has the power to restore faith. In his efforts to help restore Nature's power to heal the world, MacDonald contributed to the growing environmental awareness during the second-half of the nineteenth century.

Unlike so many other Victorian novelists, who removed earlier Romantic idealism from their writings, MacDonald, as we discussed in Chapter Three, remained true (as he would have thought) to the lessons of Wordsworth. Over and again, MacDonald tried to revive in his literature the feeling of finding God in Nature. Though he found substantial literary inspiration

for writing about the city (some of his works remind us of Dickens), Nature remained for him a spiritual place. His views on Nature, which were, indeed, highly influenced by Wordsworth, not only enhanced his theological principles, but they impacted his perspectives on societal reform. Like Wordsworth, MacDonald was deeply concerned with the spiritual issues surrounding man's withdrawal from Nature. The chaotic growth and overcrowding of the nineteenth-century city birthed numerous environmental problems that had a negative impact on the health and safety of those exposed to urban pollution. MacDonald documented these issues and treated them as if they were mere consequences of what he termed *mammon*-worship. He saw that the divine sacredness of Nature was quickly being replaced by the worldly attractiveness of *mammon*. Yet, this did not bring him to despair over the fate of his nation. Ever believing that the ills of industrialism could be swayed and that the journey of progress could one day be turned back to God, MacDonald reminded his readers to seek out the healing forces of Nature.

Thus, MacDonald was a Christian pantheist. He saw and felt God everywhere, in the Swiss Alps, the uncharted pine-woods of Scotland, and in a simple green space which had been responsibly preserved in an overcrowded city. He even saw God present in the East End slum district of London, but he felt that the slum dwellers were unable to do so. They needed help from the outside, from missionary-like individuals who, as social workers, had the potential to alleviate some of their suffering. MacDonald believed that Nature could provide not only a place of physical refuge and comfort, but also, more importantly, a place where a spiritual connection with God could be established. The main problem, he saw, was the inaccessibility of Nature to the public. Not everyone in central London or other major cities had their own private garden to enjoy. MacDonald was not alone in thinking this. Octavia Hill also was convinced that simple but beautiful objects of Nature, such as flowers, could have the power to gladden the heavy

hearts of her poverty-stricken tenants. In an effort to enact this idea, she and her sister, Miranda, founded an early environmental organisation which they called the Kyrle Society to bring Nature to the people. By the end of the century, Hill founded the National Trust, which was born out of the Kyrle Society. MacDonald must have seen the Kyrle Society's mission as an opportunity to actively bring his theological ideals into play.

In the political realm, MacDonald's strongest act was when he contributed to the great vivisection debate of the 1870s and 1880s, as was discussed in Chapter Four. Prior to this thesis, scholarly attention has neglected to explore MacDonald's active support for the antivivisection movement. One of the goals of this thesis was to uncover the extent to which he supported animal welfare and the effect it had on his theology. Though there is no evidence to show that he was ever a formal member of the Anti-Vivisection Society, he nevertheless supported its cause by publishing two sermons with the implicit intention of challenging those in favour of vivisection. One of these sermons was originally inserted in a novel and later republished as an antivivisection tract.

Oddly, despite his undoubtedly strong feelings for animal rights, he was not a vegetarian. This is indeed surprising for it was common for animal rights activists to also support the vegetarian movement, which was occurring around the same time. Yet, MacDonald justified his decision to eat meat by embracing the concept of sacrifice. MacDonald believed that every being (plants and animals included) has been given a purpose in life by God: to serve others in obedient love. MacDonald used a similar argument when he addressed the topic of hunting in his fiction. Likewise, situations of animal abuse and discipline, as represented in his novels, coincide to suggest that humans and animals are kindred beings on a journey back to God.

During a time when certain findings of nineteenth-century science (e.g. theories of evolution/degeneration, the fossil record, etc.) shook the foundations of faith, MacDonald reacted with vigour—not to oppose science, but to use it as another way of seeking God. Thus, MacDonald reacted to Darwin's theory of natural selection and the Victorian fear of degeneration by offering a new interpretation: man was either moving up or down the scale of evolution. MacDonald was not concerned with scientific facts but with spiritual truths. This idea had already been widely discussed with his fantasy fiction, but not with his non-fantasy novels.

Ideas for Future Research

As with any study on a historical writer, it is inevitable that certain questions remain unanswered. After reading this thesis, one may simply ask what other issues MacDonald may have addressed in his novels. Indeed, there are many others; however, this thesis has only discussed those issues which played a major part in MacDonald's writing due to their reoccurrence and the clarity with which they were expressed. Other important Victorian issues such as war, female education, and the Socialist Movement can be found in the novels, but MacDonald's representation of them is abstract and sometimes inconsistent. This is most noticeable with his treatment of crime, though a few words on the subject can be given here. Several of the novels depict a variety of heinous felonies such as burglary, murder, and child abduction, none of which ever receive legal punishment.

Good examples of these can be seen with Tom Worboise, the protagonist in *Guild Court*, and Cornelius Raymount, Hester's brother in *Weighed and Wanting*, both of whom burglarise the banks where they work for gambling purposes. Although both eventually repent their crimes, neither is faced with a legal prosecution. Like what young Tom Gradgrind, in Dickens's *Hard*

Times (1854), or Abel Magwitch in *Great Expectations* (1861) appears to show, an escape from the law is not only desirable but advantageous for the wrongdoer.

In *Thomas Wingfold, Curate* (1876), Helen Lingard's brother, Leopold, whilst in a drugged fit of jealous passion, murders a young woman. Much of the subsequent plot revolves around his avoidance of facing justice. Eventually, his crime is confessed to the novel's hero, Thomas Wingfold, who, with the knowledge that Leopold's health is fading, chooses not to report him to the legal authorities. Thus, Thomas is allowed time to befriend Leopold and aid him in his spiritual regeneration. Then, the victim's mother, who eventually finds Leopold's hiding place, attempts to confront him and bring him to justice. Yet, Thomas, having seen Leopold's spiritual improvement, attempts to persuade her otherwise by threatening to publicise her own sin of bigamy. Thomas later muses: 'I suspect it is the weight of her own crime that makes her so fierce to avenge her daughter. I doubt if anything makes one so unforgiving as guilt unrepented of' (*Thomas Wingfold, Curate*, Chapter LXXXVIII, 'The Blood-Hound Traversed', 458). Thus, he sees her vengeance not as justice, but as an acknowledgment of personal guilt and his justification for the use of blackmail is both interesting and troubling.

MacDonald returns to this idea in *Donal Grant*. In the novel, Lord Morven attempts to take the life of his ward, Lady Arctura, in the hope of gaining the family's fortune. Yet, this is not all; MacDonald's plot reveals that he was also guilty of murdering his wife and infant many years previously. Donal, a tutor in Morven's castle, discovers his crime, yet refrains from reporting him to the law. Instead, Donal patiently seeks to reform Morven's spiritual nature. During one scene in the novel, Donal has a fleeting thought of punishing Morven but refrains because he feels that only God knows how to properly administer vengeance. The narrator follows this by adding:

I do not believe that *mere* punishment exists anywhere in the economy of the highest; I think *mere* punishment a human idea, not a divine one. But the consuming fire is more terrible than any punishment invented by riotous and cruel imagination. Punishment indeed it is—not *mere* punishment; a power of God for his creature. Love is God's being; love is his creative energy; they are one: God's punishments are for the casting out of the sin that uncreates, for the recreating of the things his love made and sin has unmade. (DG, Chapter LXII, 'The Crypt', 311-2)

These words are echoed later in *The Flight of the Shadow* (1891) when the narrator, Belorba Day, asks: 'Which is the more guilty—the man who knows there is a law against doing a certain thing and does it, or the man who feels an authority in the depth of his nature forbidding the thing, and yet does it? Surely the latter is greatly the more guilty [sic]' (*The Flight of the Shadow*, Chapter V, 'My First Secret', 31). Clearly, MacDonald felt that state-controlled institutions were ineffective for they would not have the ability to help the prisoner 'recreate' what his 'sin' destroyed. This belief stems largely from one of the major points discussed in this thesis, that MacDonald was primarily concerned with the spiritual regeneration of society.

Child abductions occur in *Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood* (1871), *The Vicar's Daughter* (1872), *The Wise Woman* (1875), *There and Back* (1891), and *Lilith* (1895). As well, several of the fairy tales and short stories explore this peculiar crime, such as 'The Wow O' Rivven' (1864), 'Cross Purposes' (1867), 'The Carasoyne' (1866, 1871), and 'The History of Photogen and Nycteris: A Day and Night Märchen' (1882). These abductions, always non-violent, bring about some aspect of good for the child and sometimes for the abductor, as in the case of *The Vicar's Daughter*. MacDonald uses these situations as allegories to suggest God's manner of helping his creatures develop into better individuals. This is depicted perhaps most strongly in *The Wise Woman*. Yet, like the other, major felonies which occur in MacDonald's fiction, any punishment received by the offenders is meant solely for their spiritual regeneration.

MacDonald sometimes mentions other issues that were much discussed during his day such as war, the education of females, and the Socialist political movement, but, as this thesis has

argued, he was primarily concerned with those topics for which he felt an immediate responsibility and felt compelled to represent in his fiction: aiding the poor, making Nature freely accessible to the public, and working towards the protection of animals by promoting the abolition of vivisection. These issues are core plot elements throughout his novels, providing proof that MacDonald was concerned with the social problems of the day and believed that they could be addressed through the spiritual reformation of the people. Moreover, the way in which he discusses these topics reveals that he did not think legislation could make a genuine or a long-lasting difference; instead, only a truly progressive change could occur when society itself underwent a spiritual reformation. This thesis has tried to show the extent to which MacDonald represented this communal change of heart by looking at these select social issues of his day.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

MACDONALD'S WORKS

The following are the works of MacDonald which have been cited in the thesis. Titles (in chronological order) are followed by dates of first editions, then by publication details of the working copies used in this thesis.

MacDonald, George, *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women* (1858) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2000)

-----. *David Elginbrod* (1863) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1995)

-----. *Adela Cathcart* (1864) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2000)

-----. *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (1865) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2003)

-----. 'A Journey Rejourneyed' in *The Argosy* (London: Strahan, 1865-6), 53-63 and 127-33

-----. *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood* (1867) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2004)

-----. 'The Golden Key' (1867) in *The Complete Fairy Tales*, ed. by U.C. Knoepflmacher (New York: Penguin, 1999), 120-44

-----. *Unspoken Sermons: Series I, II, III* (1867, 1885, 1889), 3 vols (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2004)

-----. *Guild Court: A London Story* (1868) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1999)

-----. *Robert Falconer* (1868) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2005)

-----. *The Seaboard Parish* (1868) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2004)

-----. *England's Antiphon* (1868) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1996)

-----. *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2002)

-----. *Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood* (1871) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1999)

-----. *The Princess and Curdie* (1883) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2005)

-----. *The Vicar's Daughter* (1872) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1998)

-----. *Wilfrid Cumbermede* (1872) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1997)

-----. *Malcolm* (1875) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2004)

- . *Thomas Wingfold, Curate* (1876) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2002)
- . *St. George and St. Michael* (1876) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1996)
- . *The Marquis of Lossie* (1877) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2004)
- . *Sir Gibbie* (1879) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2000)
- . *Paul Faber, Surgeon* (1879) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1998)
- . *Castle Warlock* (1882) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1998)
- . *Weighed and Wanting* (1882) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1996)
- . *Donal Grant* (1883) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1998)
- . *What's Mine's Mine* (1886) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2000)
- . *Home Again* (1887) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2003)
- . *The Elect Lady* (1888) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2003)
- . 'Preface', *For the Right*, Karl Emil Franzos, trans. by Julie Sutter (Harper & Brothers: New York, 1888), pp. v-x.
- . *A Rough Shaking* (1890) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1999)
- . *There and Back* (1891) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1998)
- . *The Flight of the Shadow* (1891) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2001)
- . *The Hope of the Gospel* (1892) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1995)
- . *Poetical Works* (1893), 2 vols (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1996)
- . *Heather and Snow* (1893) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2004)
- . *A Dish of Orts* (1893) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2009)
- . *Lilith: A Romance* (1895) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2001)

SECONDARY LITERATURE

Works relating to MacDonald:

- Crockford, Ally, 'Sitting on the Doorstep: MacDonald's Aesthetic Fantasy Worlds and the Divine Child-Figure' in *Rethinking George MacDonald: Contexts and Contemporaries*, ed. by Christopher MacLachlan, John Patrick Pazdziora, and Ginger Stelle (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2013), 140-56
- Dearborn, Kerry, *Baptized Imagination: The Theology of George MacDonald* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006)
- Durie, Catherine, 'George MacDonald and C.S. Lewis' in *The Gold Thread: Essays on George MacDonald*, ed. by William Raeper (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1990), 163-85
- Gabelman, Daniel, 'Divine Carelessness': *The Fairytale Levity of George MacDonald* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St Andrews, 2011)
- Harriman, Lucas H., ed., *Lilith in a New Light: Essays on the George MacDonald Fantasy Novel* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2008)
- Hastings, A. Waller, 'Social Conscience and Class Relations in MacDonald's "Cross Purposes"', in *For the Childlike: George MacDonald's Fantasies for Children*, ed. by Roderick McGillis (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 75-86
- Hayward, Deirdre Christine, 'David Elginbrod and Jacob Boehme's *Aurora*', *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, 18 (1999), 33-44
- , *George MacDonald and Three German Thinkers* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Dundee, 2000)
- Hein, Rolland, *George MacDonald—Victorian Mythmaker* (1993) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 1999)
- , *The Harmony Within: The Spiritual Vision of George MacDonald*, rev. edn (Chicago: Cornerstone, 1999)
- Johnson, Joseph, *George MacDonald: A Biographical and Critical Appreciation* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1906)
- Johnson, Kirstin Jeffrey, *Rooted in All Its Story, More is meant than meets the Ear: A Study of the Relational and Revelational Nature of George MacDonald's Mythopoeic Art* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St Andrews, 2011)

Johnson, Rachel, 'The MacDonald Family and *Pilgrim's Progress*', *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, 8 (1989), 1-2

-----, 'Pilgrims: The MacDonalds and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*', *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, 21 (2002), 15-23

Kegler, Adelheid, 'Mariana Leaves the Moated Grange: The Social Revolutionary Ethics in *Weighed and Wanting*', *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, 12 (1993), 25-42

Knoepfmacher, U.C., *Ventures into Childland: Victorians, Fairy Tales and Femininity* (U of Chicago P, 1998)

Kregliner, Gisela Hildegard, *George MacDonald's Christian Fiction: Parables, Imagination and Dreams* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St Andrews, 2008)

Lewis, C.S., *George MacDonald: An Anthology* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946)

MacDonald, Greville, *George MacDonald and His Wife* (1924) (Whitethorn, CA: Johannesen, 2005)

-----, *Reminiscences of a Specialist* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932)

MacDonald, Ronald, *From a Northern Window: A Personal Reminiscence of George MacDonald by His Son* (1911), Masterline Series 1 (Eureka, CA: Sunrise Books, 1989)

Manlove, Colin, *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975)

McGillis, Roderick, ed., *For the Childlike: George MacDonald's Fantasies for Children* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992)

Neuhouser, David L., 'George MacDonald and Social Issues', in '*A Noble Unrest*': *Contemporary Essays on the Work of George MacDonald*, ed. by Jean Webb (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar's Publishing, 2007), 6-14

Pennington, John, 'Muscular Spirituality in George MacDonald's Curdie Books' in *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, ed. by Donald E. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 133-149

Prickett, Stephen, *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976)

-----, *Victorian Fantasy* (Sussex: Harvester, 1979)

- Raeper, William, *George MacDonald* (Tring: Lion, 1987)
- ed., *The Gold Thread: Essays on George MacDonald* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1990)
- Reis, Richard, *George MacDonald's Fiction: A Twentieth-Century View*, Masterline Series 3 (Eureka, CA: Sunrise Books, 1989)
- Robb, David S., 'George MacDonald and Animal Magnetism', *VII: An Anglo-American Literary Review*, 8 (1987), 9-24
- , *God's Fiction: Symbolism and Allegory in the Works of George MacDonald*, Masterline Series 4 (Eureka, CA: Sunrise Books, 1989)
- ed., *Huntly in Former Days: Two Studies of Huntly's Past* (n.p.: The George MacDonald Society, 1998)
- , *The Scottish Novels of George MacDonald* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1980)
- Sadler, Glenn Edward, ed., *An Expression of Character: The Letters of George MacDonald* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994)
- Saintsbury, Elizabeth, *George MacDonald: A Short Life* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1987)
- Smith, Jeffrey W., 'George MacDonald's Approach to Victorian Social Reform in *The Vicar's Daughter*' in *Rethinking George MacDonald: Contexts and Contemporaries*, ed. by Christopher MacLachlan, John Patrick Pazdziora, and Ginger Stelle (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2013), 69-83
- , 'The Polluted City and the Healing Power of Nature: Wordsworthian Idealism in *Guild Court*', *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, 31 (2012), 18-30
- , 'Pre-Raphaelite Imagery in the Writings of George MacDonald: Representations in "The Imagination", *The Seaboard Parish* and *The Vicar's Daughter*', *Journal of the Scottish Society for Art History*, 17 (2012), 14-8
- Stelle, Ginger, 'The Exemplary Deviant: Wynn timer as a Symbol of Victorian Womanhood in *The Vicar's Daughter*', *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*, 24 (2005), 51-60
- , *A Swipe at the Dragon of the Commonplace: A Re-Evaluation of George MacDonald's Fiction* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St Andrews, 2011)
- Triggs, Kathy, *The Stars and the Stillness: A Portrait of George MacDonald* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1986)

Webb, Jean, ed., *'A Noble Unrest': Contemporary Essays on the Work of George MacDonald* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007)

-----, 'Realism, Fantasy and a Critique of Nineteenth Century Society in George MacDonald's *At the Back of the North Wind*', in her *'A Noble Unrest': Contemporary Essays on the Work of George MacDonald* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 15-32

Wolff, Robert Lee, *The Golden Key: A Study of the Fiction of George MacDonald* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1961)

Yamaguchi, Miho, *George MacDonald's Challenging Theology of the Atonement, Suffering, and Death* (Tucson, AZ: Wheatmark, 2007)

OTHER WORKS

Allen, Michelle, *Cleansing the City: Sanitary Geographies in Victorian London* (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2008)

Anderson, Anne Hoole, 'Bringing Beauty Home to the People: The Kyrle Society, 1877-1917' in *Octavia Hill's Letters to Fellow-Workers, 1872-1911: Together with an Account of the Walmer Street Industrial Experiment*, ed. by Robert Whelan (London: Kyrle Books, 2005), 703-33

Anderson, Anne and Elizabeth Darling, 'The Hill Sisters: Cultural Philanthropy and the Embellishment of Lives in Late-Nineteenth-Century England' in *Women and the Making of Built Space in England, 1870-1950*, ed. by Elizabeth Darling and Lesley Whitworth (Aldershot: Ashgate: 2007), 33-48

Arata, Stephen, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin De Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996)

Ausubel, Herman and Louis L. Snyder, *The Late Victorians* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1955)

Beer, Gillian, *The Romance* (London: Methuen, 1970)

Bell, E. Moberly, *Octavia Hill: A Biography* (London: Constable, 1942)

Berdoe, Edward, *Browning's Message to His Time: His Religion, Philosophy, and Science* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1890)

Boyd, Nancy, *Josephine Butler, Octavia Hill, Florence Nightingale: Three Victorian Women Who Changed Their World* (London: Macmillan, 1982)

- Brooks, Van Wyck, *The Flowering of New England, 1815-1865*, rev. edn (n.p.: E.P. Dutton, 1937)
- Carlyle, Thomas, *Chartism* (1840) (London: Chapman and Hall, n.d.)
- , *Past and Present* (1843) (London: Chapman and Hall, n.d.)
- Collins, Philip, 'Dickens and London' in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, ed. by H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff, Vol. 2 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 537-57
- Collins, Wilkie, *Heart and Science: A Story of the Present Time* (1883), new edn (London: Chatto & Windus, 1884)
- Corelli, Marie, *The Master-Christian* (London: Methuen, 1900)
- Coveney, Peter, *The Image of Childhood: The Individual and Society: A Study of the Theme in English Literature*, rev. edn (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1967)
- Curtius, Ernst Robert, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979)
- Darley, Gillian, *Octavia Hill* (London: Constable, 1990)
- Darwin, Charles, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), 2nd edn (London: John Murray, 1889)
- Darwin, Francis, ed., *Charles Darwin: His Life Told in an Autobiographical Chapter, and in a Selected Series of His Published Letters* (London: John Murray, 1892)
- Daunton, M.J., *House and Home in the Victorian City: Working Class Housing, 1850-1914* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983)
- Dawson, Christopher, 'The Humanitarians' in *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians: An Historic Revaluation of the Victorian Age* (London: Sylvan Press, n.d.), 247-53
- Dickens, Charles, *Bleak House* (1853), ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998)
- , 'Inhumane Humanity' in *All the Year Round*, 7 (17 March 1866), 238-40
- , *Little Dorrit* (1857), ed. by Stephen Wall and Helen Small (London: Penguin, 1998)
- Dodgson, Charles, 'Some Popular Fallacies about Vivisection', *Fortnightly Review*, 23 (June 1875), 847-54
- Eigner, Edwin M. and George J. Worth, eds., *Victorian Criticism of the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985)

Elliott, Dorice Williams, *The Angel out of the House: Philanthropy and Gender in Nineteenth-Century England* (Charlottesville, VA: UP of Virginia, 2002)

Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 'Nature' (1844) in *Nature, Addresses, and Lectures, The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 14 vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1883), I

French, Richard D., *Antivivisection and Medical Science in Victorian Society* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1975)

Fuchs, Barbara, *Romance* (New York: Routledge, 2004)

George, Jodi-Anne, 'Rossetti's Menagerie: The Condition of Animals in Victorian Britain', *Journal of the Scottish Society for Art History*, 17 (2012), 19-23

Gill, Stephen, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998)

Gregory, James, *Of Victorians and Vegetarians: The Vegetarian Movement in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007)

Harrison, Peter, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2001)

Hill, Octavia, *Colour, Space, and Music for the People*, reprinted from *Nineteenth Century*, May 1884 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1884)

-----, *Octavia Hill's Letters to Fellow-Workers, 1872-1911: Together with an Account of the Walmer Street Experiment*, ed. by Robert Whelan (London: Kyrle Books, 2005)

-----, *Our Common Land and Other Short Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1877)

Hill, Octavia and Andrew Mearns, *Homes of the London Poor and The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* (1875; 1883) (London: Frank Cass, 1970)

Hoggan, George, 'Letter', *Morning Post*, (2 February 1875), in *Awe for the Tiger, Love for the Lamb: A Chronicle of Sensibility to Animals*, ed. by Rod Preece (Vancouver: UBC, 2002), 310-12

Houghton, Walter E., *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1957)

Hurley, Kelly, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996)

- Keating, Peter, 'Fact and Fiction in the East End', in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, ed. by H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff, Vol. 2 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 585-602
- , ed., *Into Unknown England, 1866-1913: Selections from the Social Explorers* (n.p.: Fontana, 1976)
- , *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971)
- Kete, Kathleen, 'Animals and Ideology: The Politics of Animal Protection in Europe' in *Representing Animals*, ed. by Nigel Rothels (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2002), 19-34
- Knoepfmacher, U.C., 'Introduction' in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. by U.C. Knoepfmacher and G.B. Tennyson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1977), xvii-xxiii
- , 'The Novel between City and Country' in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, ed. by H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff, Vol. 2 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 517-36
- Koven, Seth, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004)
- Larkin, Maurice, *Man and Society in Nineteenth-Century Realism: Determinism and Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1977)
- Leon, Derrick, *Ruskin: The Great Victorian* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1969)
- Levine, George, 'High and Low: Ruskin and the Novelists' in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. by U.C. Knoepfmacher and G.B. Tennyson (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1977), 137-52
- Macmillan, Duncan, *Scottish Art: 1490-1990* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1990)
- Maurice, C. Edmund, ed., *Life of Octavia Hill as Told in Her Letters* (London: Macmillan, 1913)
- Maurice, Emily S., ed., *Octavia Hill: Early Ideals* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928)
- Maurice, Frederick D., *The Workman and the Franchise: Chapters from English History on the Representation and Education of the People* (1866) (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1970)
- Mayne, Alan, *The Imagined Slum: Newspaper Representation in Three Cities, 1870-1914* (Leicester: Leicester UP, 1993)

- McDonald, Lynn, ed., *Florence Nightingale's Theology: Essays Letters and Journal Notes*, Vol. 3 (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2002)
- Mill, John Stuart, *Autobiography* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1873)
- Mitchell, Sally, *Frances Power Cobbe: Victorian Feminist, Journalist, Reformer* (Charlottesville and London: U of Virginia P, 2004)
- Morris, Pam, *Realism* (London: Routledge, 2003)
- Nightingale, Florence, *Notes on Nursing for the Labouring Classes* (London: Harrison, 1861)
- Pain, Barry, *The Octave of Claudius* (London and New York: Harper and Bros, 1897)
- Patten, Robert L., "'A Surprising Transformation': Dickens and the Hearth" in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. by U.C. Knoepfelmacher and G.B. Tennyson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1977), 153-70
- Preece, Rod, ed., *Awe for the Tiger, Love for the Lamb: A Chronicle of Sensibility to Animals* (Vancouver: UBC, 2002)
- Robertson, David, 'Mid-Victorians amongst the Alps' in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. by U.C. Knoepfelmacher and G.B. Tennyson (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1977), 113-36
- Rosen, George, 'Disease, Debility, and Death' in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, ed. by H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff, Vol. 2 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 625-67
- Rupke, Nicolaas A., ed., *Vivisection in Historical Perspective* (London and New York: Routledge, 1987)
- Ruskin, John, *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) (London: George Allen, Sunnyside, Orpington, 1895)
- Ryder, Richard D., *Animal Revolution: Changing Attitudes towards Speciesism*, rev edn (Oxford: Berg, 2000)
- Scott, Derek B., *The Singing Bourgeois: Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room and Parlour*, 2nd edn (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001)
- Scott, Walter, *Tales of a Grandfather; Being Stories Taken from Scottish History. Humbly Inscribed Hugh Littlejohn, Esq.*, 3 Vols (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1828-31), I
- Spencer, Colin, *The Heretic's Feast: A History of Vegetarianism* (London: Fourth Estate, 1993)

- Stange, G. Robert, 'The Frightened Poets' in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, 2 vols., ed. by H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), II, 475-94
- Taylor, Brandon, *Art for the Nation: Exhibitions and the London Public, 1747-2001* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999)
- Tennyson, Alfred, *The Poems Of Tennyson*, ed. by Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, 1969)
- Trotter, David, *The English Novel in History, 1895-1920* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993)
- Walker, Pamela J., *Pulling the Devil's Kingdom Down: The Salvation Army in Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2001)
- Wells, H.G., *The Island of Doctor Moreau: A Possibility* (New York: Stone & Kimball, 1896)
- Whelan, Robert, *Helping the Poor: Friendly Visiting, Dole Charities and Dole Queues* (London: Civitas, 2001)
- Williams, Raymond, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973)
- Wohl, Anthony S., *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London: Methuen, 1983)
- , *The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London* (1977) (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2002)
- Wordsworth, William, *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson and Ernest de Selincourt, new edn (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1964)